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The Nation.

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EDITORIAL

FIRST, TAKE 41,000 BOOKS . . .

A few years ago *Publishers Weekly* ran an article called "Too Many Books?" The office of our literary editors could have been used to illustrate it. Some 41,000 books are published in the United States every year, and most of them seem to end up there. There are books on every shelf, arranged in teetering piles for ambitious and improbable group reviews. There are books on windowsills, chairs and desks—hardy and self-important books by famous authors, these, the sorts of books that are not used to being kept waiting. Most of all, though, there are books on the floor: the literary hoi polloi, for which no publicity director makes phone calls and which no reviewer requests, a vast jumble of printed matter that on certain greenish-grayish afternoons seems to be writhing, silently and miserably, like the damned in Dante's inferno.

It would be nice to say that our wisdom and perspicacity are such that we evaluate with unfailing accuracy this great tide of books, never overlooking the deserving, always rewarding the good. But it would not be true. The ratio of new books to those we have space to review in a year is about 175 to one; any selection procedure (and we do have them—in fact, we have new ones all the time) is bound to be largely whimsical. The most we can hope for is to remember the shelves, to resist the more arrogant members of the windowsill-chair-desk set and to rescue, every once in a while, an innocent from the floor.

Is this unfair? Yes. That said, how cheerful it is that this abundance of books exists. Despite Reaganomics and acid rain and the death of the Equal Rights Amendment and all the other excellent reasons to give up and sulk in a corner, people continue to pour out this flood of arguments, images, stories. Reminding us that there can be no such thing, really, as too many books. Only too few readers.

FALL BOOKS ISSUE

MEMO: ROLAND BARTHES
Richard Howard

ELLMANN'S JOYCE, AGAIN
Bernard McCabe

LAURIE COLWIN'S 'FAMILY HAPPINESS'
Jennifer Allen

PLUS POETRY, HUMOR AND MORE

AT LAST! THE INSIDE STORY

OPERATION BELSCAM

FRANK PAGE

A year after I joined the staff of *Belles Lettres* magazine as an assistant editor there was a great scandal. The copy boy was discovered to have been selling review copies to a dealer in used books on rather a grand scale for rather a long time. The copy boy, Art Folio, was 49 years old and had held the job for thirty-two years. His salary from *Belles Lettres* was $248 a week. His take-home from the review copies was about twenty grand a year.

He had come to *Belles Lettres* when he was 17. Before his arrival it had been the practice at the magazine to take a copy boy fresh from a good college—the son of a friend of the editor, say—give him a look at editorial work and after a few months send him on his way with a reference. At some point it was suggested that what *Belles Lettres* needed was a person to run copy to the printer pronto, unwrap incoming books from publishers, mail out books to reviewers, go-fer coffee in the morning and beer in the afternoon, and take calls when the editors were busy. (In fact, soon after Folio was hired he made a certain name for himself by answering the phone and saying, "*Belles Lettres.* For whom does the bell toll?")

When Folio started at the magazine his experience had been six months as office boy for *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, a Catholic subscription monthly. Frank Flush, our managing editor, who had been around a long time himself and had originally hired Folio, liked to explain that he always favored Catholics for jobs subject to pilferage, bribery and embezzlement. "Especially jobs with no future," he said. "Many's the better-qualified Jewish person I've turned down for such a job. I will say, though,

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LETTERS.

FORCHÉ'S POETRY

Somerville, Mass.

I cannot let William Jay Smith's comments on Carolyn Forché's *The Country Between Us* go by without comment ["John Logan Wins Marshall Prize," *The Nation*, Oct. 16]. I do not know Forché personally, and though I wrote a blurb for her book, I do not consider it above criticism. Close reading of it with students has revealed to me some ambiguities (either in syntax or due to a lack of information that could have been incorporated in the poem or supplied as a note) and also some line breaks that don't quite work. But this is only the second book of a young writer, and the enthusiasm I expressed in the blurb is only minimally qualified by these reservations.

What I object to in Smith's article is that he does not criticize technique and structure, as one poet can usefully do for another, but instead attacks Forché's character and motives. To accuse of "radical chic" someone who has risked her life to investigate, on behalf of Amnesty International, the violation of human rights amid the extreme and horrifying violence of a Central American civil war is, to my mind, unforgivably insulting.

In the course of what is possibly a misreading of a particular poem, he characterizes its concluding lines as having a tone of "coy condescension," and says this tone "is not absent elsewhere in the volume." But he provides no evidence to support that charge. I can see how the lines he quotes—in which Forché tells a childhood friend, who is trapped in her trailer with her war-broken-vet husband, that she herself has "been to Paris since we parted"—*can* be read as smug, but the crucial passage in the poem occurs earlier: "I always believed this,/Victoria, that there might/be a way to get out."

Read in the context of the whole book (and this volume strikes me very much as a deliberate totality, where each poem is meant to reflect from and on every other, rather than as a collection of wholly autonomous pieces that happen to have been accumulated during certain years of the writer's life), Forché's earlier belief that one could "get out" has not been vindicated by "Paris" or other foreign travel. Rather she has come to see there is no such thing as *escape from* but only *dealing with* the harsh realities of the world. "The choice is ourselves/or nothing," says the last line of the last poem in the book. According to this reading, Forché's mention of Paris is not smug at all. In effect she's saying, "Your mistakes led you to where *you* are—I acted differently, and have led a very different life, but have found it just as grim."

Even if my interpretation of her attitude toward the friend in the trailer is false and Smith, in this instance, is correct, that does not justify his unsubstantiated charge of a *pervasive* condescension in Forché's book. And above all, to suggest that she witnessed horror in El Salvador and stuck it out for over two years just for the sake of being "in the right place at the right time for the most dramatic effect" is the sort of potshot electioneering politicians fire at their opponents, and is wholly unworthy of a fellow poet.

Denise Levertov

London

The October 16 *Nation* reached me here on October 28. Usually the time lag is beneficial; unhappy stories go down better at a distance. But not this time, and I hope I am not too late to reply, because for those who care about the cultivation of American poetry, and especially for younger poets in need of encouragement, William Jay Smith's piece about the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize casts doubtful light on an important award.

Smith's comments about Linda Pastan are generous and accurate, which is all the more reason to wonder why some of his comments about Carolyn Forché are so unkind. To reduce Forché's El Salvador poems to "radical chic" and to suggest that they exploit a fad . . . is more than damning; it is a blow to the integrity of poems whose authority derives from bearing witness to the horror of our time. Nothing worse can be said of a poet brave enough to address our current political torment than that he or she aims to cash in.

Smith ought to have known better. Forché's poems from 1976 through 1978 are continuous with the later poems and were conceived and written well before El Salvador became hot news. In the summer of 1977, when very few of us (perhaps not even Smith) felt sustained alarm over events in Central America, Forché was working with Claribel Alegría, the Salvadoran poet in exile, on translations of the latter's poetry. During her early years of involvement in El Salvador, Forché met often with indifference, sometimes with suspicion; and if Smith does not prefer her kind of poetry, to respect her effort would have been simple decency.

Equally unfortunate is Smith's apology for a way of judging poetry that openly discourages younger poets. He tells us that John Logan's poems "lack the clarity, precision and perfected edges" of poems by Josephine Jacobsen, and that Logan's "are by comparison rough and ragged." Smith does seem to think that Jacobsen has done the finer work. Nevertheless: "while Jacobsen's book presents the poetry of only the past several years, the two volumes by Logan give us the work of thirty years or more." For Smith at least, bulk counts. And if awards are given on such merits, younger poets must see that they will not have much of a chance against the thirty-year veterans, one or another of whom yearly brings out a selection of his or her life's work.

Smith is entitled to his notions, but to have them identified with the Marshall prize would be damaging to the award's dignity. The award should not become the occasion for discounting other poets, nor should it be presented in such a way as to give the appearance of partiality. I hope *The Nation*, by announcing its co-sponsorship of the prize, does not also mean to endorse Smith's views.

Terrence Des Pres

SMITH REPLIES

Cummington, Mass.

I regret that Denise Levertov thinks I have attacked Carolyn Forché's character and motives. It was certainly not my intention to do so. Forché was clearly one of the leading contenders for the Lenore Marshall prize, one who has dealt with a large subject in work that the judges found "frequently powerful and persuasive," no small achievement for one so young. But our praise, even of the winner, was not unqualified, and in the case of Forché my reservations were somewhat stronger than those of the other judges. In attempting to voice them in such a small space, I may not have made myself entirely clear. The problem is that in writing about Forché's poetry, it is difficult not to sound personal because she is herself constantly being so personal. In trying to take on not just the evils of El Salvador but those elsewhere in the world, she often places herself so much in the foreground that, as a witness, she gets in the way of her subject, however important that subject may be. This is not a matter of character but of technique, and it is a sentimental failure common to many poets old and young. It is evident in the poem I cited. I did not say that such failure *pervaded* the book but that it was *not absent* from it. Because I agree that Forché's volume is a totality, it seemed anything but a potshot to hold her accountable for appearing to equate getting from a bleak childhood to Paris, which is far from grim, with going to El Salvador, which certainly is.

I would have thought that as the subject of one of Forché's long intimate poems, Terrence Des Pres would have disqualified himself as a commentator on her work. But whatever his credentials, they should not allow him to misrepresent so blatantly what I have said. The poems of Josephine Jacobsen and John Logan are very different in texture, as anyone can see, but the judges unanimously awarded the prize to Logan, as my concluding paragraph indicated, not because of the bulk of his work but because of the power of his poems, old and new. He is able in a remarkable fashion to connect "the terrible with the tender," as Rilke puts it. It is precisely this connection that Carolyn Forché, despite the merit of her work, attempts but cannot always make.

William Jay Smith

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EDITORIALS.

Catch 28

"You are a 28," exclaimed the American consular officer. "A Communist subversive."

Two years ago Angel Rama, the well-known Uruguayan writer in exile, was told that for thirteen years the U.S. government had considered him a subversive. And yet, during that time, Rama was allowed to visit and live in America. In 1979 he was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C., and last year he was given tenure as a professor at the University of Maryland.

Because of that appointment, Rama applied for permanent residency in the United States. He was thereupon informed that although there is a provision in the McCarran-Walter Act for someone who has been classified a "28" to get a waiver for a visit—last year as many as 23,300 people listed as "28" were allowed into the country—there is no provision for such dangerous personages to receive permanent status. As a result, Rama will have to leave the country, probably by the end of the year.

Rama, who has never been a member of any Communist Party and in Uruguay was an editor at a magazine which has been described as politically similar to *The Nation*, cannot learn why he is labeled a "Communist subversive." That is classified information, according to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Rama has been told by the I.N.S. that the only way he can remain in the country is to apply for "defector status." To establish such credentials, however, he must show that he has engaged in "active opposition to the doctrine, program, principles and ideologies at issue for at least five years." But since the "ideologies at issue" are classified and Rama doesn't know what he is being asked to renounce, he's had a difficult time proving his credentials.

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So what's so dangerous about this fellow? Apparently Rama's crime is that in the late 1960s he wrote a series of articles about C.I.A. funding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. (He also signed petitions protesting U.S. intervention in Latin America and Vietnam, and Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia.) This led to his loss of favor in certain conservative circles and, recently, a public attack by a group of right-wing Latin American writers, who accused him of being part of a cabal of "communist oriented writers" who contributed to a recent issue of an American magazine, *Review*. This issue, they fulminated, is full of "tendentious propaganda in favor of international communism" and is being used "to coddle Castroism and some of its most noted agents."

All of this suggests that Rama's present predicament has to do not only with Kafkaesque bureaucracies and a Helleresque Catch 28. There's clearly a political vendetta at work here, and it is being received favorably by a government quite happy to expel those with whom it disagrees. That brings dishonor upon the instigators of this smear but even more upon those who, using the tarnished and tawdry provisions of the absurd McCarran-Walter Act, seek to give it force.

Soviet Disraeli

Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet Disraeli, has died. Reagan rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, Brezhnev presided over a conservative coalition. It is unfortunate that, like most political leaders, he stayed in power too long, so his remarkably stabilizing influence will be missed as the drama of succession unfolds. In the weeks ahead the hard-line hawks will make their bid for power. The tragedy is that two years of Reagan Administration cold war rhetoric can only have strengthened their bid. Let us hope that Brezhnev's death alerts our leaders to the need to create an environment hospitable to those in the Kremlin more interested in taking the risks of peace than the risks of war.

Kosinski Redux

The sky over 43d Street grows dark with painted birds coming home to roost. What began as one of those innocent pieces of adulation *The New York Times* publishes regularly to inflate the stock of its favorite celebrities has turned into the material of a titanic ideological struggle.

The subject was small enough: the life and literature of Jerzy Kosinski, whom Barbara Gelb profiled in the *Times* magazine last February. But beyond her flattering phrases lay an entire inventory of cold war issues at which she hardly hinted: the defense of truth against disinformation, the purification of art from the taint of politics and the protection of Western intellectual virtue against the ravages of Eastthink. Now the big battle is joined; and these times demand *The Times*.

The battleground last week was *The Times*'s Arts and Leisure section, which has apparently become the favored forum for the *Kulturkampf*. It was there that Flora Lewis launched her wide-ranging attack on Costa-Gavras's film *Missing* and its purported libels on the good faith of the American mission during the coup against Allende. In the matter of Kosinski, *Times* reporter John Corry said that seventeen years of "ideological attack" against the émigré novelist began in 1965 with charges that he somehow got the manuscript for *The Painted Bird* from a murdered concentration camp victim.

Further slanders and rumors were spread from time to time by a Polish writer named Wieslaw Gornicki, Corry said, but somehow they received little attention until this year, when *The Village Voice* published a lengthy report detailing doubts about Kosinski's exclusive authorship of his works. *Voice* writers Geoffrey Stokes and Eliot Fremont-Smith also suggested that two anti-Communist tracts Kosinski published soon after his arrival in America might have been subsidized by the C.I.A. The burden of *The Voice*'s case, however, was Kosinski's literary—not ideological—mischief.

Corry's broadside was no dispassionate "case history," as its billing proclaimed, but an emotional diatribe against an elaborate ideological conspiracy determined to "discredit" the life and the art of an anti-Communist hero. Among the plotters were not only the Polish disinformants and *The Village Voice* but this magazine (which had assigned an investigative piece about Kosinski as cultural entrepreneur) and the American Writers Congress held last fall, which Kosinski denounced as "profoundly offensive." Also in the array against Kosinski in Corry's scheme was Jack Abbott, the convict author, whom Kosinski called a "misguided leftist."

Corry's text should be useful to journalism students when they learn how to practice innuendo, sly insinuation and the use of irrelevant evidence and invidious comparison. For example, a paragraph that pits the upstanding Committee for the Free World against the sinister "new, or radical Left" is followed by a statement of the logical consequences of the left's actions: "Then, in December 1981, Solidarity fell, its leaders imprisoned by General Jaruzelski's new military government." The material of *The Village Voice*'s article (as well as the abandoned *Nation* project) is made to seem a product of the Polish Communist disinformation mill. The C.I.A. issue is dismissed without the slightest investigatory evidence.

And, most striking of all, Corry fails to note that the Kosinski issue in its current form arose not from Polish *disinformatsii* but from the word processor of Barbara Gelb. He never even mentions Gelb until the end of a very long story. But it was the Gelb puff piece, which celebrated and whitewashed Kosinski, that led to *The Village Voice* article and thus now to Corry's sorry and sinister defense.

ANDREW KOPKIND

Andrew Kopkind regularly follows the cultural wars for The Nation.

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SOVIETICUS.

STEPHEN F. COHEN

A historic and potentially contagious development, obscured by our outrage over the repression of Solidarity, has been unfolding in Poland since martial law began almost a year ago. For the first time in the history of Soviet-style systems, a Communist Party has been overthrown by its own military.

Communist Party dictatorship has always been the stated first "unalienable principle" of Soviet Marxism-Leninism and its Eastern European offspring. The party's elites, ideology, organization and policies have dominated and shaped those systems.

Until Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski's army coup on December 13, 1981, that principle had been violated only once. Stalin's terror of the late 1930s temporarily reduced the Soviet party to an instrument of his personal dictatorship. But even under Stalin, the Communist Party remained the supreme political institution, unchallenged by the Soviet military, which suffered no less than the party in the terror.

The assumption that Jaruzelski's Military Council of National Salvation is the Communist Party's "proxy" is myopic. The Polish party has virtually disappeared as a meaningful political institution, except in Western (and Soviet) press commentaries. It has been replaced by army authority at every political level and has lost more than 600,000 members. Even the central committee's personnel department, the linchpin of the whole party apparatus, reportedly now is headed by a general.

Nor has the Military Council moved to restore party legitimacy. Instead, it has embraced every symbol of martial authority and, despite its accusations against Solidarity, blames the party's long misrule for Poland's economic and political crisis. Trials of party officials conducted by military prosecutors have taken place and more are expected. Polish authorities eventually may create a Potemkin party at Soviet insistence, but real power is in military hands.

That unprecedented development casts the specter of military takeovers, in times of crisis, over all the Communist Party systems of the Soviet empire. Generals may be party members, but bureaucratic elites stand politically where they sit professionally. Eastern European armies, which already are involved in political administration and are organized to restore internal order as much as to repel NATO forces, represent traditional authoritarian and nationalist outlooks, not Communist ideas. And Poland must confirm the armies' perception that party bureaucracies have become inefficient, corrupt and weak willed.

Indeed, Poland raises the military specter inside the Soviet Union itself, where party leaders have always feared "Bonapartism." Since the 1960s, the Soviet military establishment has grown into a powerful complex, second only to the party. It controls, in addition to armed force, the best human and material resources and a national political-ideological network of its own. Military elites, trained in special academies that favor the children of officers, are younger, more cohesive and more competent than the party elites, and are popularly associated with the rising tide of Russian nationalism.

The Soviet Communist Party is far stronger than its Eastern European counterparts and is in no immediate danger of being overthrown. But it is entering an uncertain period of unprecedented leadership changes in the wake of Brezhnev's death and it faces severe economic problems. Proposed solutions to those problems are already provoking conflict over the military's swollen, and zealously defended, budget.

Until now, the Soviet military has been the party's junior partner, their top leaderships united by cronyism going back to World War II. Poland, and the end of the Brezhnev generation, will make the military less deferential and more eager for full partnership. Indeed, it has already grown bolder in opposing what Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov recently labeled the "unpardonable mistake" of military cuts and in criticizing the party's economic management.

No wonder Soviet party leaders seem increasingly uneasy about Poland's military "normalization." They supported Jaruzelski's coup in desperation to avoid the colossal costs of an invasion. As the Polish party vanished, their anxiety became almost pathetic. Jaruzelski had to don civilian clothes when visiting Brezhnev, and the Soviet press still pretends Poland is governed by the party or "in accord" with its decisions. It was in this context that Brezhnev, accompanied by senior party leaders, made an extraordinary appearance before 500 high-level Soviet military officials on October 27 and gave his unusual public pledge "to meet all your needs."

Growing military influence will have different political consequences in different Communist countries, and thus for American policy. Given the Polish Army's nationalist identity and its leverage with the Soviet Union, military government remains Poland's only realistic hope for economic reform and some measure of political autonomy. Neither Solidarity nor the Communist Party can govern the country, and the Catholic Church will not. The only alternative is a Soviet occupation.

Our policy of escalating sanctions against Poland's Military Council, though morally satisfying, therefore serves no real purpose. It fails to distinguish between the crisis state of martial law and the prospect of more conciliatory but long-term military rule, with or without Jaruzelski. An exclusively punitive policy, as now prevails, may even undercut that last hope of a more benign military government.

Nothing good can be said, however, about greater military influence in Soviet politics. The consequences would be more cold war policies at home and abroad and still fewer political and economic reforms. Here, too, our punitive policies only make the worse outcome more likely, as Soviet military hard-liners gain strength from our own.

Meanwhile, as the Soviet Communist Party celebrates its sixty-fifth year in power this month, pondering the military parade on Red Square and the approaching anniversary of army rule in Poland, it may recall Marx's prediction of capitalism's ironic demise: to escape crisis, it calls forth its own gravedigger.

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CALVIN TRILLIN

A couple of weeks ago, an acquaintance of mine who is known around the office as Harold the Committed asked me if I wanted to see civilization as we know it destroyed in a nuclear holocaust, and I had to admit that I didn't. It happens that he had asked the same question a few weeks before, and I had given him the same answer. I can't imagine what led him to think that my position on the destruction-of-civilization issue might have wavered in such a short time. What kind of person does Harold the Committed think I am? Sure, there are days when things don't go quite the way I had hoped they would. Occasionally, I go through what I think of as a multimotor day: the automobile repairman says we need a new motor, the dishwasher repairman says we need a new motor, the clothes-dryer repairman says we need a new motor. Even on a multimotor day, though, I don't sit down with a drink when it's all over and say to myself, "Well, if that's the way it's going to be, I would like to see civilization as we know it destroyed in a nuclear holocaust." I'm much more likely to say something like, "But didn't we just *get* a new motor for the dishwasher?"

I didn't go into all of that with Harold the Committed, of course. That's the sort of thing that can hurt Harold's feelings, and he's got enough trouble as it is—what with the refugee problem in Africa and repression in South America and the steady loss of topsoil in the Midwest. What I said to Harold the Committed in answer to his question was, "I've given this issue a lot of thought, Hal the C, and I remain firmly opposed to the destruction of civilization as we know it in a nuclear holocaust. You can count on me on this one."

"What are you doing about it?" Harold the Committed said.

"As it happens, you've caught me at a bad time, Harold the Committed," I said. "You know I'm not very political just before Halloween."

I wasn't just spinning an alibi for Harold the Committed. Just before Halloween, I always have a lot on my mind. For one thing, I have to decide on a costume for the Halloween parade. Are people getting tired of my ax murderer's mask? Should I take advantage of my uncanny ability to bark like a dog by going as an unhappy Airedale? Harold the Committed finds it difficult to understand how I can spend so much time agonizing over a costume for the Halloween parade; he goes every year as an unemployed coal miner.

My Halloween responsibilities go well beyond my own costume. I have to be a consultant to my daughters in the matter of their costumes, since my wife's attitude toward Halloween, I regret to say, borders on the blasé. I have to take part in serious discussions about the possibility that my daughters and I might encourage my wife to wear something more appropriate than a token witch hat.

"Daddy, I don't really think you're going to be able to persuade Mommy to wear that long, crooked witch's nose with the warts on it," one of them is likely to say.

"Well, how about these individual, rubberized, easy-to-remove face warts?" I say hopefully.

Although the old political saw holds that the electorate doesn't pay complete attention to a national political campaign until after the World Series, I find that my attention is not really engaged until after Halloween. Some years, of course, that gives me only two or three days to concentrate on the campaign, but I usually find that sufficient: If I have trouble making up my mind, I simply ask Harold the Committed which candidate is less likely to follow policies that might lead to the destruction of civilization as we know it in a nuclear holocaust. This year, the two days of campaign commercials I took in made me grateful I hadn't paid much attention before, since a lot of them seemed to feature members of the candidate's family talking about why he should be elected. I could envision one of my daughters looking straight into the camera and saying, "Please send my daddy to Congress because then he won't be around as much to embarrass us in public by barking like a dog."

"Halloween can be approached as an opportunity," Harold the Committed said. "Like any other public event, it can be used as a platform for making a political statement."

The last time Harold the Committed started talking about Halloween that way he ended by suggesting that my 10-year-old daughter, Sarah, go to the Halloween parade costumed as Emma Goldman. She decided to go as a chocolate-chocolate-chip ice cream cone with chocolate sprinkles instead.

"What's your daughter Sarah going as this year?" Harold the Committed asked.

"She's leaning toward the idea of going as a jar of Hellmann's mayonnaise, Hal the C," I said.

"She really doesn't have a lot of political awareness, does she?" Harold the Committed said.

"It's not her awareness she's worried about, it's other people's," I said. "Last year not everybody was aware that she was supposed to be a chocolate-chocolate-chip ice cream cone with chocolate sprinkles. A couple of people thought she was a tube of toothpaste. She figures a mayonnaise jar would be a little more explicit."

"Abstract ideas can be illustrated by costumes," Harold the Committed said, apropos of nothing I could think of except his annual suggestion that my older daughter, Abigail, costume as the dangers posed to our society by the military-industrial complex.

"You lose again, Hal the C," I said. "Abigail's going as an M & M." Abigail has never been much impressed with Harold's costume suggestions, particularly since he persuaded his niece to go as a peace dove and everyone thought she was supposed to be Donald Duck.

"It's a matter of paying lip service or making a political statement through every aspect of your life," Harold the Committed said. "Everyone must make a decision."

"I've decided, Hal the C," I said. "I'm going as an ax murderer again after all."

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Operation Belscam

(*Continued From Front Cover*)
that when a Catholic goes wrong he goes very wrong. I'm referring, of course, to certain Italian-American types, or, to be more specific in a general way, to certain Sicilian-American types. But, all told, I'll stand behind a Roman Catholic for a job with high temptation and low potential."

The editor of *Belles Lettres*, Jonathan Margin, was put onto the scam by purest chance. It seems that Folio got his review copies out of the office not by carrying them, which would have taken a wheelbarrow, but by mailing them to three false addresses. The addresses had changed over the years, but the final ones were: "Mr. Christopher Kleinkopf," at a local post office box; "Mr. Charles Synonyms," in care of Folio's girlfriend, Sylvia Topstain; and "Mr. Eric Blair," a name listed on Folio's home mailbox. Christopher Kleinkopf was a real person who conducted a monthly column on self-help books for *Belles Lettres*, Folio's thinking being, presumably, that if the mail clerk actually read the magazine, the familiarity of the name would allay suspicion. In the same way, Charles Synonyms was a frequent reviewer of sexology books. As for Eric Blair, Folio later told me he had picked that name because it sounded literary.

One might guess that it was the Eric Blair that caught Folio up. Actually it was the Christopher Kleinkopf. Kleinkopf for years had been coming into the office once a month to pick up his self-help books, which Folio would put aside for him from among the hundred-or-so review copies that arrived at *Belles Lettres*'s office each day. This last time, however, Kleinkopf decided to mail the books to himself rather than carry them home and therefore took them to the mailroom, where the Puerto Rican mail clerk pointed out to Kleinkopf that the books were being sent to the wrong address.

At first Kleinkopf thought the mail clerk was just being rude, especially since he spoke in Hispanic singsong—"Meester Kleinkopf, I theenk you have a wrong address here, a wrong address, I theenk you have eet here." But there happened to be in the mailroom a Kleinkopf package, which the mail clerk brought forth to prove his point. Kleinkopf wanted to open it immediately, but the mail clerk insisted on the presence of a higher authority and called the editor, Jonathan Margin, to come attest that Kleinkopf was who he said he was.

The package was found to contain, at list price, four hundred dollars' worth of fancy titles—unreviewable reference, art and technical volumes—none of them suited to Kleinkopf's column. Margin, Kleinkopf and the mail clerk retired to Margin's office, and Shirley Baskerville, head of security for *Belles Lettres*'s parent company, was summoned.

Once Margin had explained *Belles Lettres*'s mailing operation, which was entirely Folio's responsibility, everything seemed pretty clear. But Miss Baskerville, who was a lawyer, warned, "Knowledge of guilt is one thing, proof another." She then said that the contents of the Folio-to-Kleinkopf package would be recorded and all the books marked after the manner of ransom money ("a small X on each page 100"), the bundle resealed and sent to its destination. She also said that she would have a man at the other end to see who picked it up and, if possible, photograph him ("Excuse me, photograph the *person*," she said desexingly). She also said that all mail emanating from *Belles Lettres*'s office would be examined and, if necessary, opened, the contents recorded, etc. She pointed out that while the case was under investigation Margin should in no way modify his usual treatment of, or dealings with, Folio "or anyone else in the office," she added, giving Folio a slight benefit of the doubt. "And I hardly need say that this matter must remain absolutely confidential. On the one hand, we don't want the guilty party to fly the coop. On the other hand, we don't want *Belles Lettres* to be sued for libel."

Two weeks later, Margin, Miss Baskerville and I gathered in Margin's office, and Folio was called in for a showdown.

"Sit down, Art," Margin said benignly. "Do sit down! This may take a while. I believe you know Miss Baskerville, from security."

"Not personally," Folio said, and arranged himself in the depths of a collapsed Morris chair. He crossed his legs, put an elbow on the arm of the chair, the ball of a thumb under his chin and the end of the attending index finger to the tip of his nose. He seemed pretty cool.

The rest of us sat down in captain's chairs turned out from a long conference table on one side of Margin's office. "Perhaps we should have a record of all this," Margin said. "What do you think, Miss Baskerville?" She thought we should, and Claire Tippin, Margin's secretary, joined us with her steno pad. Margin turned the floor over to Miss Baskerville.

As she laid out the case, I watched Folio. He took the allegations like a pro, which is to say, not like an innocent. He was a small, wiry man with dark curly hair and blue eyes. If I hadn't known him or known what he was up to, he might have struck me as a feisty loser, with a touch of ironic self-protection around the mouth. But, as it was, he made quite a different impres-

DRAWINGS BY KIMBERLY BULCKEN

Frank Page is an imaginary editor of Belles Lettres, *an imaginary magazine.*

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sion. His clothes, for instance: he wore a checked jacket, tattersall shirt open at the neck, flannel trousers and soft-leather loafers, which on a mere clerk would have been too sporty, but on an entrepreneur made you think of the flats on a weekday afternoon, and the clubhouse at that.

"It has come to our attention," Miss Baskerville began, using notes, "that a number of books, sent by publishers to the offices of *Belles Lettres* for review purposes, have been directed by an unauthorized person or persons into the hands of a book dealer or dealers specializing in resale to the public at reduced cost. It has also come to our attention that these books (which on receipt at the offices of *Belles Lettres* become the property of said magazine) were mailed, at the expense of *Belles Lettres*, to three fabricated addresses," which Miss Baskerville carefully spelled out for Claire Tippin to copy down.

"In the last two weeks a total of nine packages were sent from the *Belles Lettres* office to one or another of these addresses. The nine packages were opened, their contents recorded and witnessed, and then sent to their postal destinations. I have here in my hand a list of said contents—103 books, with a retail value of $2,306.95. Two of the three packages sent to 'Christopher Kleinkopf' arrived at the above-mentioned post office box and were duly picked up. Although our operative was unable to photograph the person who claimed the packages, the operative surreptitiously visited this office and identified the claimant as Arthur Folio. I have in my hand an affidavit to that effect. Two of the three packages sent to 'Charles Synonyms' in care of 'Sylvia Topstain' presumably arrived at their destinations. I say 'presumably' because their contents were subsequently traced to a further point, which I will come to in a moment. Finally, all three packages sent to 'Eric Blair' were delivered to the residence of Arthur Folio, as witnessed and sworn to by the doorman at the residence of said Arthur Folio. Are you getting this, Miss Tippin?"

"Yes, yes," she said, allowing herself a quick, troubled look at Folio.

"The complete contents of these seven packages," Miss Baskerville went on in her masterly fashion, "plus thirty-seven other books, believed to have been mailed earlier to one or another of the above-mentioned addresses, were delivered by Sylvia Topstain to the MyShelf Bookstore on Tuesday of this week. Miss Topstain was paid in cash the amount of $600.49 by the manager of said store, who has made an oral statement to the effect that Miss Topstain and, before her, Cynthia Binding, sold to the MyShelf Bookstore on a bi-weekly basis for eleven years—that is, the life of the bookstore to date—so-called 'review copies' of recently published books, whose yearly retail value amounted to $20,000 when the sales began eleven years ago and $80,000 in the year past. We have evidence that both Miss Binding and Miss Topstain have been intimately associated with Arthur Folio, Miss Binding for at least four years, which association came to an end seven years ago, and Miss Topstain for the seven subsequent years, continuing into the present. We have, in fact, an oral statement from Miss Binding attesting to her dealings with the MyShelf Bookstore and her relationship with Arthur Folio as well as an expression of willingness to make a sworn statement to that effect. Have you anything to say, Mr. Folio?"

"You mean about Cynthia Binding?" Folio said.

"No, I mean about this entire affair," Miss Baskerville said.

"Aren't you going to read me Miranda?"

"I am not the police, Mr. Folio, although I venture the opinion that you will have your chance to talk with them. For the present, I would like to know whether you have anything to say about these allegations at this point in time."

"Sure," Folio said, "but not while Claire is taking it down, if you know what I mean."

"Why, may I ask," Miss Baskerville said, "do you object to having your statement transcribed if it is to be a true statement?"

"The I.R.S."

"The *I.R.S.*!" Miss Baskerville said.

"I mean, we don't want to help the I.R.S., do we? So how about it, Claire?" Folio said and nodded toward the door.

Miss Tippin looked at Margin, Margin at Miss Baskerville, Miss Baskerville nodded at Margin, Margin at Miss Tippin, who flipped over her pad and stood up.

"And close the door, babes," Folio said.

Claire Tippin did as she was told, and we all settled back for the statement.

"First of all, I'd like you all to know that I think you did a great job on this, especially you," Folio said, pointing to

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Miss Baskerville. "Also, I'd like you to know that there used to be some nice people here. Not private detectives. If they thought you were fooling around a little, they'd call you in and ask you, if you know what I mean."

"And you told them?" Miss Baskerville said.

"I was never called in. But sure. If, like, they thought someone was pushing a few books, they'd say, hey, cut it out, and that would be that."

"We're talking about more than a few books, Mr. Folio," Miss Baskerville said.

"How about you call me 'Art,' and I call you 'Shirl'?"

"Suit yourself, Mr. Folio. I'm more interested in what you have to say about the allegations."

"The allegations. O.K., the allegations. Well, I started this job at $42 a week—$42 a week, if you know what I mean. Which was $3 more than I was making before. But I'll tell you something. The guy who was editor then, Mr. Deckle, was all right. I mean, he *cared*. He used to say to me, 'Arthur, I enjoy your hair. It's one of the things I look forward to on my way to the office.' He kept telling me I should change my name to Mario. 'All the waiters at the Century Club are named Arthur. You should be Mario.' I told him Mario Folio sounded a little fruitio, which broke him up. He was all right. But the allegations. O.K. So publishers were falling all over themselves to send Mr. Deckle personal copies of their expensive books, and he always had them shipped home. I wondered what he did with all the books. You know what he did? He sold them. A bookstore sent a truck around every month to pick them up. But there were still a lot of books coming in that no one wanted. Textbooks. Foreign books. And I started taking them home, one, two at a time. One night Mr. Deckle and I were going down in the elevator, and he asked me what I was reading there. It was a book on schizophrenia—thirty-two bucks. I told him my sister had schizophrenia, was why I was interested. He said that was a great tragedy, and he wanted to know if she was an attractive person like myself. I don't have a sister, but I told him she had the face of an angel and the body of a chorus girl. He said he could well believe it and gave me a little pat on the can. I mean he *cared*."

"That's very interesting, Mr. Folio, but perhaps you could tell us more

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about how your book-selling operation developed?" Miss Baskerville said.

"Don't you wonder why I'm handing this to you on a platter?"

"I assume you're making a clean breast of it."

"You're cute, Shirl," Folio said, and gave her a big smile. "So there's no more to tell. You got it all down with sworn statements and fingerprints. You don't need anything from me."

"There must have been a transition from taking a book or two home to the $20,000 operation we have here."

"Sure, it took time. It grew, like any business," Folio said.

"Then essentially you admit the allegations?"

Folio held up a hand. "You're pushing me, Shirl. I didn't sign anything."

"No, but there are three of us present who heard you confess, and our sworn statements to that effect would be tantamount in a court of law to a signed admission of guilt."

"So what are you going to do, Shirl?"

"Do you see any reason why we should not turn the matter over to the authorities?"

"Yes," Folio said, "I see a reason."

Margin, who had slumped down in his chair, now spread his hand over his mouth and nose like a mask. He knew something was coming, if not exactly what.

"I got another operation here," Folio said.

"Besides the books?" Miss Baskerville said.

"Beside the books," Folio said.

Margin and Miss Baskerville looked at each other, then back at Folio. Folio waited, seeming to want a formal question. So I asked it: "What *is* the other operation, Art?"

He smiled at me. He knew it wasn't my affair. And it was as if he, too, were an observer and only Margin and Miss Baskerville had something at stake.

"It's been a smooth operation," Folio said.

"Why not tell us about it," I said.

"All right, I will—I sell places on the best-seller lists."

"*Sell places on the best-seller lists!*" Margin and Miss Baskerville said together.

"Five grand a spot," he said, and again waited.

"Go on!" Miss Baskerville said.

Folio turned to me.

"Yes, go on, please," I said.

"O.K., since you ask. First of all, I compile the reports from the bookstores, right? All the shit work, right? There are fifteen spots on the fiction list and fifteen spots on the nonfiction list, right?"

We nodded. Margin had sunk even lower, and his hand was now covering one eye.

"O.K. The books that don't get on the lists go from sixteen to, like, ten thousand, where nobody's counting. Right?"

Nod.

"O.K. So I charge five grand to push a book one spot. If a book is sixteen and not on the list, it's five grand to make it fifteen and on the list. If it's seventeen, it's ten grand to make it fifteen and on the list. Same price to go from three to one, ten grand."

"Is that five thousand per place per week?" Miss Baskerville asked.

"Correct," Folio said.

"Then some people presumably use your services for more than one week."

"Satisfied customers," Folio said.

"That could be very lucrative."

"Correct," Folio said.

"May I ask you how you got in-

BEHOLD!

All flesh is as the glass that shatters, through which we see
Within, and cannot do without. Thus as we both gaze
Through this wide pane at the morning haze the ground exhales,
Distant, shrouded mountains and these younger, nearer ones,
Shoulders bared and nudging elbows with each other, all
Seem to paste themselves against another kind of plate,
A pane of air placed between where they are and the glare
That presses its face against this picturing window.
This reflective window meanwhile is half-mirroring
The mind of someone—you? me? or are we of one mind?
—Someone glassy-eyed and starry-minded who surveys
These giant ridges and furrows of thought lit up with
Points of high color where cars crawl along hidden roads.

All glass is as the flesh which refracts its energies
Because of something unseen within it, which is framed
So that the seer and the seen are both beyond it.
Glass through which we look thus reflects our very looking;
So bare limbs embedded in mountain landscape conform
To each other's curving in the body's second thoughts.
Some buried eye of touch peers through the transparency
Of thigh on thigh, hand shaped to breast; this gentle fiction
Lasts a moment only, though: in the next light body
Mirrors body, flesh touches other flesh, by feeling
In touch with itself, as in fables that the clear eye
Whispers to what it can see through, toward what it is out
Of touch with, candid old tales of distance, space and glass.

WHEN BLOOD IS NIPPED

The language of the howling wind allows an endless
Tale of winter to be told in one long syllable,
Here where this sea of glowing air has become a mere
Glaring of diffuse and mindless light as unaware
As each dumb, chilling mid-day is of its transience,
Of how it will be grasped by the comprehensive dark.
Everything we see in such light is an optical
Allusion: this is not the winter of sunny noons,
Of smooth-packed snow gleaming in the farmyard, icicles
Eyeing the ground under the barn, of the white shed where
A dairymaid still churns away by hand at the tub
Of metaphor. This is not that, but the fact-ridden
Unfair land of the cold space, of the unmoving time.

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to this operation, Mr. Folio?"

"You may well ask," he said. "It started a few years ago when an editor who once worked here left to go into public relations. He was promoting a movie that was being made from a best seller. He called me up. Did I have the names of the bookstores we get our best-seller information from? He'd pay me $500 for it. What did he want it for, I asked. He told me his company had an idea that their movie should come from the *number-one* best seller, and if, for a reasonable amount, they could make it number one, they would. With the names of the bookstores they could send people out and maybe buy enough copies to push it to the top. The book, at the time, was, like, three and not going anywhere. I asked him how much he thought it would take. Ten-fifteen grand, he said—at least that's what the company was willing to spend. I said that even if he did have the names it would be dangerous. Everyone he sent out would know what was going on. He said if word leaked it just would be more publicity, and publicity was publicity. I said that he could never pull the trick again, and he said that's the way it was with great ideas. And I said that, even if he had the names, by the time he got working on it the book would probably be five or six or lower, and ten-fifteen grand wouldn't be enough. Then I said that for ten-fifteen grand maybe I could arrange to give the book a little push from inside and save everybody sweat and money. And then I added that if everybody was satisfied maybe we could go into business and do it on a regular basis for different companies. He liked the idea, and I said I'd talk it over with the boss, and maybe we could make an arrangement."

"*Talk it over with the boss!*" Margin said. "Do these people think I'm party to this fraud?"

"It's hard to tell what they think, Mr. Margin. Maybe they do. I can tell you one thing, they wouldn't be able to understand how the editor didn't know what was going on with his own best-seller lists."

"They're not *my* best-seller lists. It's a mechanical operation. Once it's set up, why should I have anything to do with it?"

"Well, maybe it's more like they wouldn't be able to understand, if there's money around, how the editor wouldn't get some of it. Most of it, in fact. You know, the lion's share to the lion. And there would be no way to prove that the editor didn't. I mean, like, I get five grand a spot. It doesn't show on my bank statement. Suppose four out of every five ended up in your pocket, Mr. Margin, it wouldn't show on your bank statement either. If you see what I mean."

"I see exactly what you mean," Margin said and looked desperately at Miss Baskerville.

"So if it was up to me, Mr. Margin, I'd swallow the whole thing."

There was a period of silence and common thought. Then Margin cleared his throat and said, "All right, Folio, I think we have the picture. I suggest you clean out your desk, and I'll call you about the disposition of your case."

"I don't like this, Mr. Margin," Folio said. "I been around here a long time, and I don't think you have the right to throw me out on my can, if you know what I mean."

"What *do* you mean, Folio?"

"I mean, like, I'll go to the publisher of *Belles Lettres*. I wouldn't even have to say you were in on the take. I mean, where *were* you, editor in chief, when I was hustling the review copies and the

FIGURING IT OUT

You wrote something on this page last summer. I've just come
Across it. Trying to make sense of it now, trying
To figure out what the errand was you might have sent
Me on—and, even more, what new chore knowing about
What you'd meant then sets up for me now—it's like coping
With the Law that, while being laid down, had been cut up
Into bits with some sort of saw. Thus the commandment
Was to interpret before all else. The puzzling
Injunctions, cross words, prohibitions themselves riddled
With gaps that might or not be loopholes, are more binding
Than bronze statutes standing in public squares, stone tables
Set up in rocky precincts, too easily followed
To have to be obeyed. More binding. More to be sung.

Stories are a matter, though, of radiance, of wholes.
Thus: The day was too clear and bright merely to have been
Exemplary, to blossom and then blast with sundown
And subsequent decay into the mud of the night,
Into one more bit of what could not be *evidence*
That the sun also rises etcetera. The day
Was too clearly *that* day—when you laughed over spilt milk,
When I cried over spilt wine, when we saw eagles, claw
Hooked in claw, wheeling together over the bald crags—
To be merely that, or to be merely a July
Someteenth. That it was a day like any other meant
That it was totally singular, a story too
Clear, too directly told not to be a parable.

RITES OF PASSAGE

Where were you back in New York in nineteen forty-two?
The World War won, the Second One then in the winning,
I left one kind of boyhood for its starved antitype.
I still got you mixed up with the genius loci
Of some timely spot, as when in nineteen fifty-four
Rain made Harvard brickwork glisten, my mind drank the light.
Back in New York again in 'sixty-eight, even then
We had met with some kind of recognition, although
I still went my own hasty way too much of the time.
Yet again in Connecticut, my fifty-second
Year is in your hands—and you in mine—who commanded
Candles of ardent occasion to deepen their glow,
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John Hollander

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best-seller lists? We'd both be out on our can, Mr. Margin."

Again there was a thoughtful silence, and Margin said, "What do you suggest?"

"I been around here a long time, like I said, wrapping bundles, cleaning toilets. I think I deserve something."

"A raise?"

"A promotion, Mr. Margin. I want to be an editor, like everybody else."

"An *editor*!" Margin said.

"What do *you* think of that?" Folio said to me.

"You certainly seem clever enough," I said.

"That's the way I figure it," Folio said. "So what do you say, Mr. Margin?"

"Leave us, is what I say."

"You mean, and you'll let me know?"

"And we'll let you know," Margin said in his deepest tones.

As soon as Folio was out of the office, Margin said to me, "For God's sake, find out what he can do. Take him to *lunch*."

"You're going to promote him?" I said.

"What can I do, man? He has me by the . . ."

"Bells?"

"Yes, so to speak," Margin said.

I let Folio pick the restaurant, and, sure enough, he chose a Mafia hangout, where he was a regular and obviously respected. I leveled with him and said that Margin was going to make him an editor and I had been delegated to find out how he could be useful.

"First," he said, "you ought to know that I never pulled off the best-seller scam."

"You're kidding! You made it up on the spot?"

"Not exactly. I was working on it with my friend in the movie business. It would have been ready in two-three months. But what could I do? They were ready to turn me over."

"Art, you understand I'm supposed to make a full report on this to Margin."

"Go ahead, babes! He won't believe it—he thinks I'm dishonest. Anyway, as soon as he makes me editor, I quit. There's no money in *Belles Lettres* now."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to be a *bookie*. What else?" □

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Remembering Roland Barthes

RICHARD HOWARD

Mutual friends brought us together in 1957. He came to my door in the summer of that year, disconcerted by his classes at Middlebury (teaching students unaccustomed to a visitor with no English to speak of) and bearing, by way of introduction, a fresh-printed copy of *Mythologies*. (*Michelet* and *Writing Degree Zero* had already been published in France, but he was not yet known in America—not even in most French departments. Middlebury was enterprising.) Until his death in 1980, we remained intimates, and as I continue translating his work (several books are still to be published here), the dialogue continues too, however lamely. He is a presence in my life, though one no longer to be addressed, a presence that speaks out of a silence, into a silence. Looking through two dozen letters, I find few items of literary interest—only the sort of thing an author tells a translator he knows pretty well: "You ask for the Hobbes references—*mon petit Richard*, perhaps I made them up! You must translate back into English and blame it on me in a footnote."

Now, of course, there are books, even in English, about *his* books. Indeed, what prompts reminiscence here is the introduction to *A Barthes Reader**, one of Susan Sontag's finest essays and certainly the best single piece of writing I have seen about the *figure*, a word Barthes used when he meant more than a character, less than a person. I want to venture a couple of sketches of the person, whom I shall call—in order to differentiate my responses to him from those elicited by his texts—Roland. At Hannah Arendt's memorial service, I was struck by Mary McCarthy's observation that she did not want to discuss her friend's ideas "but to try to bring her back as a person, a physical being, showing herself radiantly in what she called the world of appearance, a stage from which she has now withdrawn." Something of the kind here, though Roland's radiance in that world was more reticent than Arendt's—a light *en veilleuse*, as it were.

*Hill and Wang.

Richard Howard's most recent translation of Roland Barthes is The Empire of Signs, *just published by Hill and Wang.*

Whenever I went to Paris (though he was not always there: he would be in Dakar, in Italy or in the family house in Hendaye, and returning to Paris, where he had been born and lived within four blocks all his life, would ask me about events in the city as if he were unfamiliar with Parisian diversions, Parisian prospects), I would take him a box of Havana cigars, which he relished extravagantly. He did not readily spend money on himself (though he liked being a host), and expensive cigars seemed a particularly American windfall, I guess. For all his sensitive texts about food—the pages on Japanese meals in *The Empire of Signs* seem to me the best French gastrotexts, as he might say, since Brillat-Savarin—Roland rarely joined me in restaurants. Not only did he live with his mother, he ate almost always *at home*. Dinners in the rue Servandoni (perhaps half a dozen come to mind) were simple yet festive, for Madame Barthes had the gift of not fussing, in what New Yorkers would call a fifth-floor walk-up. Even the dog, Lux, forbore. The tone in that family (there was a half-brother as well) was invariably affectionate, amiable to outsiders and charged with the sense that what was being withheld would be extended on further occasions. And indeed, when Madame Barthes came to New York, in the middle 1960s—her first visit since 1904! and her first air travel—more *was* offered: I joined them on the helicopter from the newly named Kennedy Airport, landing on top of the Pan Am building at twilight in the glittering heart of a city Madame Barthes could never have imagined from her first encounter with it, and from then on it was all pleasure. She immediately participated in her son's delight in the city, and one saw from her traveling costume where Roland got his taste for tweeds, and indeed, after many visits to "Aber-Crombie," his love of a certain kind of "British" tailoring. And one saw from their way of being together, from an interest in each other quite without inquisitiveness, that this mother and this son were able—rarest of family rituals—to enjoy the world they shared. It was not necessarily his world (or hers), but that did not taint the sharing. My discovery that his mother did not read his books, *and that Roland did not expect her to*, eased some family tensions of my own; this was but one of

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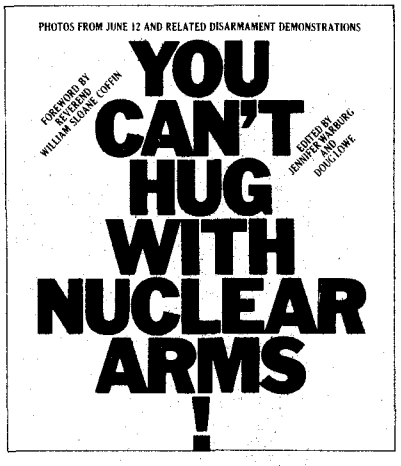
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many lessons my friend was to impart.

Roland was, as I suggest, a vigorous traveler though an inert conversationalist. In 1958 or '59 we went to Amsterdam together, driving up from Paris through the February fogs that reduced (or extended) the *autoroutes* into the Flemish landscapes he wrote about so splendidly. In the city, I recall my own astonishment at the lack of an immediate Eros in the faces and bodies we encountered, and I can still hear Roland's admonishment: "*Mon petit Richard*, don't you think there's a connection between the fact that the Dutch are the friendliest, most decent and civic-minded population in Europe and the fantasy that neither you nor I find them eroticized?" This was to be enlarged on in the essay on Pierre Loti, but the germ was there in the gay bars of Amsterdam. We went, on Roland's insistence, to Haarlem to visit the Franz Hals museum—though once in the presence of those five sinister ladies, "The Wives of the Regents," he would not speak, merely making sure I took in that infernal company. Walking along the canals afterward, I recall his saying that if his government became severely repressive (those were F.L.N. days), he would move here, as French intellectuals since Voltaire had done; it was a preconceived exile he happened to be spared, but not one that he dreaded.

In New York, *le shopping*, mostly for clothes, became a considerable pastime, and concerts more than that. Italian opera was something of a fetish, though by 1969 Roland had given up the theater—I could not persuade him to go with me to any play in Paris. His years of writing for *Théâtre Populaire* and the unsuccessful struggle to attach Brecht's ideas to the Parisian scene had discouraged him past the effort: "Not Claudel! Richard, in a Claudel play there's always an adultery and an altar, the one leads infallibly to the other." Music sustained him, however; after Sanford Friedman and I had given a big party for him (which I fear he hated), I remember asking what he'd like to do: "Just play your record of the slow movement of the Schubert trio Opus 99," he sighed, and lit a cigar. But it is not an anthology of Roland's tastes I would compile—rather, the *Stimmung*, the mood of detachment-cum-euphoria which was their goal: that's what I need to articulate. When I say Roland was inert in conversation, I mean that he felt enough at ease to let the silences hover and accumulate. I think he was thinking.

Sleep, for this man of vehement somnolences, was . . . a nightmare. During his last visit, when he spoke on Proust at the New York University Humanities Institute and hinted that he was writing a novel, or wanted to write one, I moved out of my apartment and turned it over to him. The place was transformed in two days: the blinds were never thick enough, nor the walls, and I suspect even the electric blanket failed to conform to his rigorous exigencies. This was Roland-as-Twentieth-Century-Man, with insomnia as the tragic muse: he confronted her with cigars, a little Campari and, judging by the books left behind, Bataille and Sartre.

"I can do everything with my language, but not with my body. What I hide by my language my body utters. I can deliberately mold my message, not my voice. My body is a stubborn child, my language is a very civilized adult" (*A Lover's Discourse*). Indeed, Roland's books were to become increasingly what Goethe had said his were: fragments of a great confession, or, as Sontag observes, a return to Montaigne. To his graceful, searching anatomy of himself, I can add only two notes: Roland's hands had the much reticulated palms of a very old monkey. They seemed to belong to another species, not to a man who wrote only with a fountain pen (I have never seen a typescript). His voice was resonant and what the French call *chantante*: he had studied singing with Charles Panzéra, and if we did not talk much about books ("You know what I liked so much about Japan? No one even thought of giving me a book!"), there was always Fauré . . .

I believe Roland hated his body, and I know he was perpetually at grips with his weight ("*Oui, j'ai beaucoup engraissé, il faut changer tout cela*"), but there was none of the usual conflict—usual, in my own experience, among intellectuals and in myself—between vanity (the world) and narcissism (the self). He was faithful to what Walter Pater, whom he had never heard of, calls the administration of the visible; he adored the physical world:

> Desire still irrigates the non-will-to-possess by this perilous movement: *I love you* in my head, but I imprison it behind my lips. I do not divulge. I say silently to who is not yet or is no longer the other: *I keep myself from loving you.* (*A Lover's Discourse*)

The accents are those of Socrates, the first—as Roland was the latest—Docent of Desire. I have never had a friend whose affection exacted so little, and the rewards of our intimacy—beyond the pleasure of his texts—are beyond mourning, though the loss is still felt. In the last letter, four months before he was run down by that laundry truck, he wrote: "Don't think me indifferent or ungrateful—it's just that since Maman's death there has been a scission

OUR WIVES

One rainy night that year we saw our wives
talking together in a barroom mirror.
And as our glasses drained I saw our lives

being lived, and thought how time deceives:
for we had thought of living as the Future,
yet here these lovely women were, our wives,

and we were happy. And yet who believes
that what he's doing now *is* his adventure,
that the beer we're drinking is our lives?

Or think of all the pain that memory leaves,
things we got through we're glad we don't see clearer.
Think of our existence without wives,

our years in England—none of it survives.
It's over, fallen leaves, forgotten weather.
There was a time we thought we'd make our lives

into History. But history thrives
without us: what it leaves us is the future,
a barroom mirror lit up with our wives—
our wives who suddenly became our lives.

Jonathan Galassi

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in my life, in my psyche, and I have less courage to undertake things. Don't hold it against me. *Ne m'en veuille pas.*" □

Re-Joycing

BERNARD McCABE

JAMES JOYCE: New and Revised Edition. *By Richard Ellmann. Oxford University Press. 887 pp. $35.*

On Candlemas Day, 1919, James Joyce, who had been hesitantly pursuing Marthe Fleischmann, a young woman he believed to be Jewish, celebrated his thirty-seventh birthday. He borrowed a menorah and his painter friend Frank Budgen's studio, and persuaded the latter to whip up a charcoal drawing of a female nude with "ample buttocks." Marthe arrived. Joyce lit the candles, ostensibly to show her the various paintings; actually to observe her observing the nude. Marthe smirked reproachfully; Joyce was excited; and later in the evening some amorous scuffling went on. Most of this information appears in the 1959 edition of Richard Ellmann's celebrated biography of Joyce. But the bit about the buttocks is brand new, part of the "wealth of new material" that the publishers claim for this latest contribution to a Joyce-saturated centennial year.

Ellmann's book, hailed as "the best literary biography of our time" when it first came out, *is* an exceptional achievement. Ellmann presents an enormous mass of information in a way that brings both the man and the art vividly before us. It is an indispensable book for Joyce scholars and Joyce-lovers.

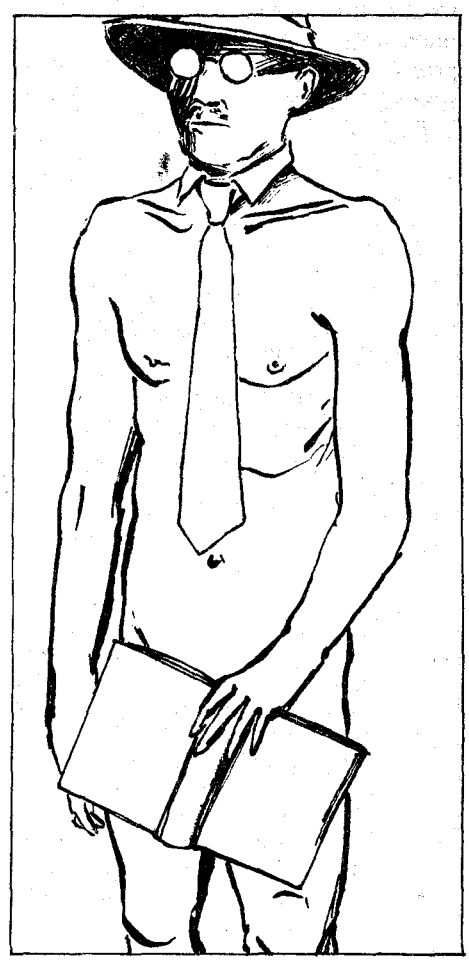
"But this prying into the family life of a great man . . . what is it to us how the poet lived. . . . Peeping and prying into greenroom gossip of the day, the poet's drinking, the poet's debts? We have *King Lear*, and it is immortal." So the aesthete George Russell bleats on in *Ulysses*. And as we read *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, what indeed is it to us how the poet lived? But Joyce urges such questions upon us. Like Stephen Dedalus, he was obsessed with the relationship between art and life, with the artist's special position as a re-creator of his own life. He told his friend Louis Gillet that his "work and life make one . . . they are interwoven in the same fabric." Ellmann takes up this hint and shows us this fabric.

Yet doubts arise. In his introduction to Stanislaus Joyce's *My Brother's Keeper*, a stiff-necked account of life with brother James, T.S. Eliot suggested that Joyce's work was so insistently autobiographical that inquisitiveness about every detail of the topography and life of the Dublin of his childhood, adolescence and young manhood is "almost expected of us by the author himself." But Eliot also warns of the dangers of "vulgarly impertinent" curiosity. Those dangers are real.

Joyce was a hero of art, with an all-consuming vision of the true artist's stature and significance. His many published letters, unlike those of such other artist-heroes as Keats or Hopkins or Lawrence, only very intermittently show him in this light—there's so little about the writing, so much about getting published and getting paid. But his artist's life was truly heroic, as Ellmann amply shows. After his Dedalean flight from Dublin in 1904, there were nine years of hand-to-mouth living as he struggled with treacherous editors to get *Dubliners* into print. Then followed more years of drudgery teaching languages as he finished *Portrait* and worked on his masterpiece, *Ulysses*. Harriet Weaver, his extraordinary benefactor, eased his poverty in later years, but his last, chaotic decade would have crushed a less heroic man. His beloved daughter, Lucia, was by then hopelessly insane; his son's marriage was breaking up; his eyes, after a dozen excruciating operations, were finally giving out. He spoke of "a blind man's rage and despair." He wrote to his son, "My eyes are tired. For more than half a century they've been staring into nothingness." But these dark phrases are rare in Joyce the artist. What comes across is a ferocious, driving, high-spirited will, *insisting* on his role. Struggling for years to get *Ulysses* published, toiling for seventeen years over *Finnegans Wake* and battling with many of his closest allies over its contents—these are the deeds that made him a hero.

Yet he was often a very unattractive man. A young prig, a bit of a snob, a timid lecher full of Irish Catholic inhibition. A misogynist. A souse. Ellmann pries into the poet's drinking and the poet's debts quite devastatingly. A relentless borrower and exploiter, endlessly self-pitying (Hemingway's typically querulous comment on him: "The damned Irish, they have to moan about something or other, but you never heard of an Irishman starving") and pettily contentious. An avid searcher for and discoverer of treachery and betrayal, a cherisher of grudges. He was ungenerous to other writers: on Yeats (who was generous to him), "A tiresome idiot, quite out of touch with the Irish people," on Proust, "I cannot see any special talent," on Eliot, not a word. He wrote curiously unfunny comic verses and played silly pranks. The older he grew, the more tetchy and selfish he became.

One could go on and on. In fact, Ellmann does go on and on. In mitigation, Joyce's attractive aspects emerge too: his intelligence and wit and intermittent high spirits; his love of good-fellowship; his sudden generosities; above all, his consuming love for Nora



Bernard McCabe teaches English at Tufts University. His critical articles and reviews have appeared in Commonweal, Commentary, Saturday Review *and many other magazines.*

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and their children. Yet even there it is hard not to feel that a feckless inattention must have had some effect on his daughter's mental stability. All in all, an ugly portrait.

Of course we can find excuses for him. Joyce's immense demands on others relate to the immense demands he made on himself. Yet how much of all that ugliness do we really need to know? Eighteenth-century French biographers debated at length over what ought or ought not to be said about the dead, the consensus being that biography should hold up good examples to the living in order to stimulate virtue. We think differently. We live in a confessional age, in which all information is deemed valuable. And Ellmann's remarkable pertinacity seems to offer us all the recoverable facts. As a result, Joyce the artist remains edifying in an eighteenth-century way, while Joyce the man becomes dispiriting, depressing, even dull. We remember, from *Portrait*, Stephen's characteristically grandiloquent rejection of a priest's vocation to become instead "a priest of the imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everlasting life." Joyce the artist did achieve something along those lines, but the daily bread of Joyce the man's experience is often some of the dailiest bread ever offered on the altar of literary biography.

Fact. Fact. Fact. Inert fact can become critical dead weight, most obviously when the fact comes closest to the fiction. Take that Marthe Fleischmann incident, for instance—with its obvious echoes in Bloom's relationship with Martha Clifford or with Gertie MacDowell or with Molly. Factually stated in Ellmann's carefully cultivated, deadpan prose, the event seems just dreary and stupid and offensive all around. But more worryingly, it *gets in the way* of the marvelously balanced presentation of Bloom's pathetic sexual quirkiness in *Ulysses*. Similarly, Ellmann's deadplod account of a Joyce family Christmas row—"the argument was so acrimonious that the Vances heard it down the street"—gets in the way of *Portrait*'s most magical and moving scene. Again, the teasing out of background and prototypes in Joyce's greatest short story, "The Dead," informative though it is, becomes burdensome and distracting. "Imagination is memory," Joyce once said. We read him for his radiant imagination. The memories that fed it too often seem weary, stale, flat and unprofitable.

Ellmann is a fresh and illuminating critic whenever he addresses a Joyce text; no one could improve on his sensitive reading of "The Dead." But this kind of know-all biography, the relentless pursuit of "sources," can be extraordinarily impertinent. When we read *The Divine Comedy* (one of Joyce's touchstones), it is of course important to know about the Malatestas or Ugolino or Cardinal Ottaviani, big figures in Tuscan history as well as in the circles of Dante's hell. But how important can it be to know anything about Little Alf Bergan or Nosey Flynn or Pisser Burke, except that they exist in *Ulysses*? The solemn pursuit of the "originals" of these dusty denizens of Dublin's back streets is absurd. Where do you stop in this kind of critical "research"? Perhaps with Private Carr. The real Mr. Carr was a minor bureaucrat at the British Consulate in Zurich, who had a row with Joyce in 1918 about some trousers and some money. Joyce, as Ellmann says, "allotted punishments as scrupulously and as inexorably as Dante," so Carr got his in a few pages of *Ulysses* where he turns up in Dublin's Inferno—Nighttown—as a drunk and disorderly British Tommy. Now Ellmann's new edition offers us a large, recently discovered photograph of Carr as a soldier a year before Joyce met him. Carr had been in the Black Watch in 1917, and he appears here in full Highland get-up, kilt, sporran and all. A triumph of impertinence.

As to the wealth of new material: well, there's more about Oliver St. John Gogarty (Joyce's Buck Mulligan), more about Harriet Weaver, a bit more about Clongowes Wood College, a bit more about Joyce's mother's death, some more Joycean songs and limericks; there's a dream notebook and there are those buttocks. Ellmann has usefully gleaned snippets from the mass of memoirs and biographies of the Joyce circle that have turned up in the last twenty years. I was, on the whole, relieved to see how little he makes of the newly available obscene letters Joyce wrote to Nora in 1909, and puzzled at how little he uses the revelations in Deirdre Bair's recent biography of Samuel Beckett about the painful Joyce-Beckett-Lucia relationship (perhaps a decent concern here for the lives of the living?).

I was surprised, however, that Ell-

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mann, who has written a half-dozen Joyce books since this one, has left so much of his material from the 1950s intact. It gives the biography an old-fashioned quality. In the 1980s, we expect a more thorough attention, for example, to social and political life in Joyce's Ireland—that gray, sunken world that followed Parnell's death, the Ireland whose revolutionary potential Lenin kept a careful eye on, as had Marx and Engels before him. Ellmann has discussed Joyce's socialism and active anti-imperialism acutely elsewhere, but there's little analysis here; no suggestion that his "indifference to the outcome" of World War I was not a passive "ivory tower" position but an active, orthodox socialist one. It was not until the late 1920s and 1930s that Joyce's obsession with *Finnegans Wake* turned him away from the world outside his art. Again, Ellmann might profitably have commented on some of the new feminist approaches to Joyce the artist (*not* the man) as a prophet. Feminists have had illuminating things to say about the wonderfully liberating nitherandthithering flow of Molly Bloom's afterword on male chauvinist Dublin, for example, and Anna Livia Plurabelle's afterword on just about everything; about Joyce's women as guardians of otherness, or, as he puts it in *Finnegans Wake*, "bringers of plurabilities."

A last small complaint: according to the new edition, Eileen Vance (Joyce's childhood playmate) is still teaching English to Indians in Saskatoon, and Harriet Weaver is still active as Joyce's literary executor—even though they would be 100 and 106 years old, respectively. Ellmann announces, rather obscurely, that since the biography "has to some degree the character of the year 1959, I have kept references to 'now' though they must be understood as referring to 'then.'" Harriet Weaver died in 1961. Why not tell the reader this in 1982?

All the same I shall be reading and rereading this fascinating book, and also looking often at all the new photographs. There are some fine family groups. And I even like the picture of Private Carr. Some Joyce addicts will welcome a grainy old photo of an apartment building in Pola, near Trieste, where Joyce and Nora spent two whole months in 1905, and a hardened Joycean may conceivably welcome a gloomy shot of a bit of the back wall of

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the small hotel where Nora was working when James Joyce ("simple-minded Jim," as she used to affectionately call him) first set eyes on her.

Adultery as Adulthood

JENNIFER ALLEN

FAMILY HAPPINESS. *By Laurie Colwin. Alfred A. Knopf. 272 pp. $12.95.*

Laurie Colwin's characters do not get sloshed and call their spouses names at dinner parties, make passes at the babysitter, holler at their children in the supermarket or talk politics at the table. They are, to use one of Colwin's favorite words, "attractive"—affluent people who conduct themselves with decorum, gentleness and at least an effort at good cheer. Even the grouchy ones aren't stingy of spirit—they aren't even really grouchy, once you get to know them. Coddled by good fortune and fond of domestic order, Colwin's men and women are ambushed by the only thing capable of ambushing them: love.

That is what happens to Polly Demarest, the heroine of *Family Happiness*, Colwin's third novel. (Alert readers will remember Polly from the short story of the same name in *The Lone Pilgrim.*) Discreet, thoughtful, seemingly serene, Polly is a "domestic sensualist," like Holly in *Happy All the Time*, whipping up late-night snacks of sandwiches and shortbread for her lawyer husband, Henry, and pancakes in animal shapes for her two children. She is "mild and kind, sensible and tenderhearted." She smells of talcum powder and lemon.

She is also the doormat in her closeknit, insular clan, the Solo-Millers. Though Polly is married and a mother, with a part-time career as a reading specialist, her strongest ties are to her parents; she is a professional daughter, routinely running errands for her mother and mediating in family squabbles. Wendy and Henry, Polly's parents, are unduly impressed with their aristocratic Jewish pedigrees and keep at a chill distance anyone outside the clan—a practice none of their tractable children find at all strange. On the contrary, the Demarests and the Solo-Millers—Polly's parents, two brothers and their wives—have brunch at the parental headquarters on Park Avenue every Sunday and gather on all holidays, including Halloween. They keep in constant contact by telephone, and most of them spend the summer together in Maine.

This family tie has put Polly in a tumult. She has taken a lover, a painter named Lincoln, with whom she sneaks trysts—sometimes right on the heels of the weekly brunch—and she is rent with guilt. "I feel unworthy," she tells him. "My family put a lot of stock in the straight and narrow. They believe in what's upright and true." In *Family Happiness*, as in several of Colwin's short stories, adultery, with its attendant conflict and pain, is the rite of passage the heroine must undergo in order to become a grown-up. With Polly, more childlike, more backward than other Colwin characters, this is true to the extreme. Her affair is her introduction to dread and grief and the messiness of life.

Much of *Family Happiness* is graceful and charming: Colwin's style by itself could carry the limpest book along. Her prose is deceptively simple and clean and droll. The bond that unites Polly's family, she writes, "is as rare as hen's teeth, as everyone who admired, envied, or disliked the Solo-Millers knew." Wendy's attitude toward dogs tells us everything we need to know about her: "In the city they collected fleas and dirt and other unpleasant things on their paws and then brought these paws into contact with one's rugs."

Colwin has surrounded Polly with a cast of quirky characters. Wendy is imperious and slightly dotty; Polly's brother Henry Jr. and his Czech-born wife, Andreya, are two harmless oddballs who dress in identical baggy clothes and rarely speak; Lincoln and Martha, Polly's only friend, are allergic to families and share a tart wit wholly absent from the Solo-Miller clan. There are some marvelously funny scenes, too. (Colwin's blithe humor has always been one of her most appealing traits. Read, for example, "The Achieve of, the Mastery of the Thing," her short story about a pothead faculty wife.) "There are blue fruits," Andreya announces at brunch, "but there are no

Jennifer Allen is a columnist for New York *magazine.*

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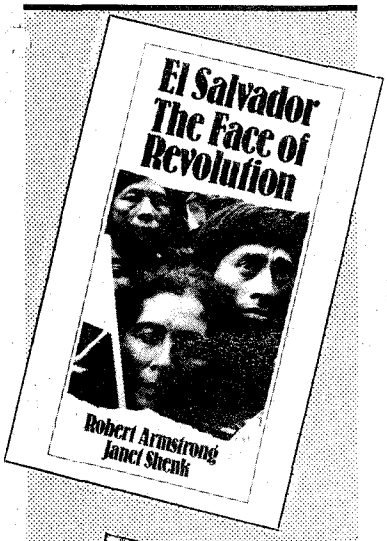

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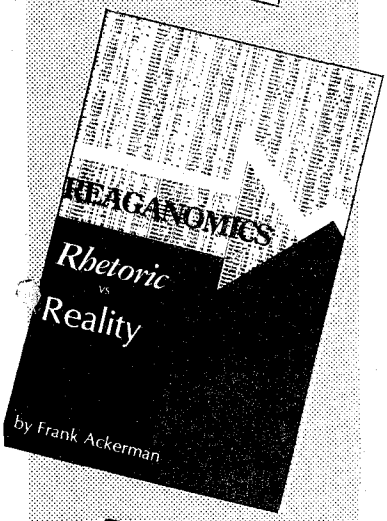

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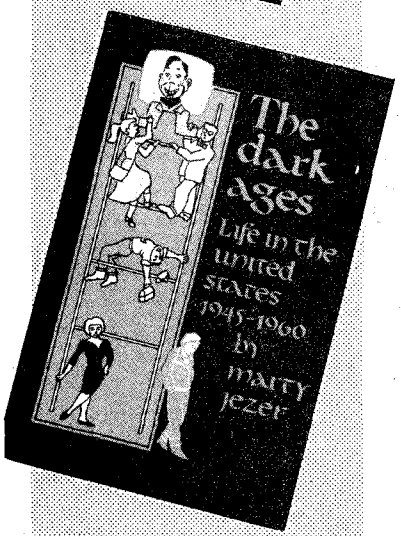

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blue vegetables. Why is this?"

As Polly's affair progresses, however, and her guilt and despair deepen, the novel runs into trouble. Again and again, she bemoans the loss of her cloudless pre-Lincoln life. She weeps because "her life would never be innocent again," chides herself for wanting more attention from her work-obsessed husband and declares herself "an unfit mother. Everything she did in her children's behalf was fraudulent because in her heart she was corrupted."

A little of this thrashing about goes a long way. It's not that we don't expect Polly to feel distressed and confused, but such protracted agony is somehow unbecoming in a well-educated, urban woman who buys *pain au chocolat* at French bakeries and attends art openings in SoHo. If nothing else, Polly is too old to pine for lost innocence. Besides, Colwin knows, and Lincoln knows, and we know, that Polly's old existence under the yoke of the demanding Solo-Miller-Demarest tribe was blinkered and far from carefree. So one loses patience when she spanks herself for not living up to the family code of honor. Reading about this part of Polly's misery made me as fidgety as listening to a friend mourn the selfish creep who's dumped her.

As if to hammer home the point that Polly is changing, Colwin catalogues the virtues of the "old Polly." The old Polly never once quarreled with her mother; never forgot anything having to do with her children; never "behaved badly"; never blubbered her troubles to a friend; never had insomnia or a serious row with her husband; never bought fresh fruit in a supermarket instead of a greengrocer's. Colwin has an enviable gift for mouthwatering descriptions of the domestic arts at which the old Polly was so adept—"the Polly that used to be," we're told, "would have had a chicken to be roasted, the makings of a green salad, and an orange cake to welcome a husband home from a business trip." Even so, her insistence that the old Polly never screwed up, not once, becomes cloying. Polly's sheer perfection strains our credulity—and our sympathy. Nobody loves a goody-goody.

Colwin takes an intriguing risk in asking us to feel compassion for a woman who has avoided much of adult experience as neatly as she might sidestep a dirty puddle. We do feel sorry for Polly—and that's the problem. Her submissiveness and naïveté are presented simply as conditions that make her suffer, like a clubfoot or a bad back. But why is she the way she is? Why is she without a single intimate woman friend? Why, in her mid-30s, does she still believe her family is the goodest and bestest that ever was? Such abject guilelessness isn't simply the byproduct of a starchy upbringing. What spooked her way back when?

To this last question, Colwin offers a kind of answer: "Deep inside her she believed that it was necessary that her character be constantly checked. Her real nature, without restraint, would get her into terrible trouble." Although Colwin tells us early in the book that Polly has "never felt bereft or lonely or frightened," we come to see that her life has been as fraught as a walk on eggs, steered by the fear that "one wrong move and people ceased to love you." Polly's trepidation is the most interesting thing about her. The novel's best scenes are the ones in which she faces it, and finally confronts her husband and Wendy for sponging off her slavishly good nature.

Polly's rebellion is long overdue, and a relief when it comes. But no sooner does she wake up to it than she tidily decides not to be angry anymore. She embraces her new, tangled life—husband, lover, Solo-Millers and all. While Polly's resolution may be a sound enough way to solve her problems, it's too abrupt. Polly has just begun her tardy adolescence; her epiphany comes too fast, too soon. Colwin can write convincingly about people in turmoil—see her first novel, *Shine On, Bright and Dangerous Object*. This time, though, she seems to be holding out on us. □

LETTERS.

SELF-SERVING QUIBBLE

To the editor:

Someone should caution your readers that Daniel Grosskopf's biography of Gen. Ignatz Fedgalski recently reviewed in your pages is, sadly, a slapdash assemblage of misinformation—a fact that seems to have eluded your touchingly credulous reviewer. While it would take far more space than is available here to correct all of Grosskopf's errors, let me comment on just one of his more egregious blunders. It was not a left tibia but a right fibula. It was not gold-plated, merely highly polished. It wasn't that of an enemy general, just a captain. Readers interested in avoiding overstatement, dubious scholarship, a third-rate indexing job and a ham-handed literary style are advised to await publication of my own biography of the Great Tactician.

Meade Ardmore
The Citadel
Charleston, South Carolina

POINTLESS ANECDOTE

To the editor:

The discussion in your pages of Daniel Grosskopf's fascinating new biography of Gen. Ignatz Fedgalski recalled to mind my own encounter with the Great Tactician. As a young first lieutenant at the end of the Second World War, I was assigned to the army of occupation and billeted in Vienna. Walking down the *strasse* in search of some rich pastry for my commanding officer, I popped into a nearby bakery. The little shop was crowded with frightened civilians, jostling G.I.s and jovial soldiers from several of the Allied armies. Unsure of the proper procedure, what we called the S.O.P., I must have looked rather bemused. Just then, the general himself slapped me on the back. I recognized him by his famous trademark, the vicious dog that accompanied him everywhere—even, so the scuttlebutt had it, into the shower. "Son," chuckled the old warrior, "you'll just have to take a number and wait your turn like everyone else but me." Then, shouldering his way to the front of the crowd, he ordered several dozen linzer tarts and strode out of the store without paying for them.

David Burgas
Tampa, Florida

WHINING AUTHOR

To the editor:

I am concerned by the questionable ethical standards displayed in a recent review in your pages. It is certainly the right of your critic, Stephen Pasni, to dislike a book, in this case my biography of Gen. Ignatz Fedgalski. It is, however, not his right to be a smarty-pants, a pompous big-mouthed blowhard, a bombastic know-nothing jackass or a contemptible moronic jerk.

Daniel Grosskopf
Somewhere-on-Hudson, New York

MR. PASNI REPLIES

So sue me.

RANDY COHEN

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The Blank, Annihilating Page

PAUL SCHMIDT

THE RANDOM HOUSE BOOK OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY FRENCH POETRY. *Edited by Paul Auster, with translations by American and British poets. Random House. 635 pp. $25.*

This excellent anthology undertakes a double task: to provide a comprehensive view of French poetry in the twentieth century and to show, in the range of translators it offers, the influences of that poetry on American and British poets. "Many of the most important contemporary American and British poets have tried their hand at translating the French," editor Paul Auster writes in his introduction, and the list of translators in this volume is indeed impressive. Here, among others no less accomplished, are Samuel Beckett, Richard Wilbur, William Meredith, W.S. Merwin, Ron Padgett, John Ashbery, Wallace Stevens, Kenneth Rexroth, Ezra Pound, William Jay Smith, Richard Howard, T.S. Eliot. In all, forty-nine French poets are represented here, and seventy-five British and American translators. Interestingly, many of the more contemporary French poets are translators of British and American poetry; the influences may well work both ways.

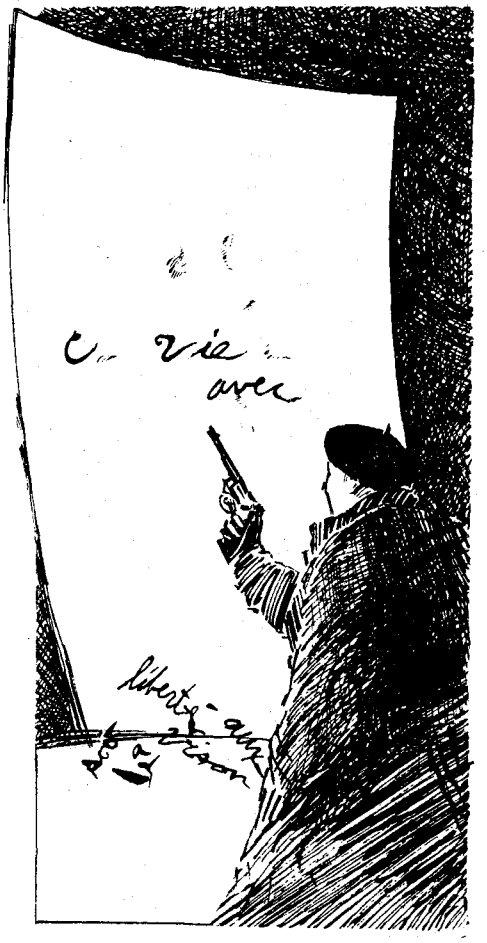
The relationship between poetry in French and poetry in English is a complex one, and—let me speak now about American poetry—less a matter of influences than of fundamental, perhaps irreconcilable, differences. That at least is what this anthology tells a careful reader, for the course of twentieth-century French poetry reveals concerns that seem never to have occurred to American poets. The anthology opens with Apollinaire, and in its choices makes clear the path that has led "modern" French poetry from its two great progenitors at the end of the last century—Rimbaud and Mallarmé—to the present. It also makes clear another path, a historical one: we see in all these poems the effects of two world wars. The dislocation and destruction of war are evident in what these poets have seen and in what they feel able to say about what they have seen. Both these paths, the literary and the historical, record the loss of certainties and forms. We see, traced from Apollinaire through Jacob, Breton, Aragon, Artaud, Char and Jabès, the abandonment of verse patterns for the patterns of prose, the attempt to rely on repeated syntactic patterns for structure. In the next generation of poets—du Bouchet, Jacottet, Deguy, Pleynet and Albiach—we see the dissolution of syntax, of grammar itself, into nothingness. The blank page takes over the poem, and moves its obliterating force against the very act of writing.

This sense of the primacy of writing is foreign to American poetry. "The French tradition and the English tradition in this epoch are at opposite poles to each other," Octavio Paz has written. "French poetry is more radical, more total. In an absolute and exemplary way it has assumed the heritage of European Romanticism." But it is important to note that this Romantic heritage began with a specific image, whose first major occurrence in French is probably found in de Musset's *Nuits*: the poet seated at his desk, pen in hand, paper before him, the Grand Imperative hovering in the moonlight over his head. The act of writing becomes the act of God, creation out of nothing. But in the twentieth century, that nothing has grown from an inert and natural void to an alien and hostile chaos.

In French poetry we are constantly aware of the page beneath the pen, of the empty whiteness that threatens creation with annihilation. Whiteness means menace: "Silence," writes Jean Daive, is "clumps of whiteness"; the poet, writes Veinstein, "must depend entirely on this hand in order not to get completely *trapped* in the whiteness." The journeys of most of the younger poets in this volume—Delahaye, Royet-Journoud, Daive, Giroux, Pleynet, Albiach, Hocquard—are across the terrifying space of the empty page, and their poems seem written out of a compulsion to leave a trace, in the full knowledge that the trace is ambiguous and unstable and may have no meaning for those who make the same risky journey after them.

This aspect of modern French poetry has had less effect on most American poets than one would sometimes wish. By comparison, much American poetry seems naïve in regard to its own possibilities—and certainly in regard to its potential responsibilities. Francis Ponge lays down a definitive challenge in his poem "Rhetoric":

> I assume that we are talking about saving a few young men from suicide and a few others from becoming cops or firemen. I have in mind those who commit suicide out of disgust, because they find that others own too large a share of them.
>
> To them one should say: at least let the minority within you have the right to *speak*. Be poets. They will answer: but it is especially there, it is always there that I feel the others within me; when I try to express myself, I am unable to do so. Words are ready made and express themselves: they do not express me. Once again I find myself suffocating.
>
> At that moment, teaching the art of *resisting words* becomes useful, the art of saying only what one wants to say, the art of doing violence to words, of forcing them to submit. In short, it is a matter of public safety to found a rhetoric, or rather, to teach everyone the art of founding his own rhetoric.
>
> This saves those few, those rare individuals who must be saved: those



Paul Schmidt is the author of Arthur Rimbaud: Complete Works in Translation *(Harper & Row).*

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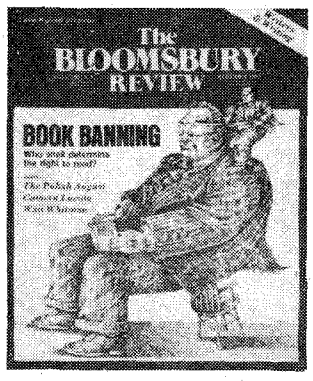

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who are aware, and who are troubled and disgusted by the others within them.

Those individuals who make the mind progress, and who are, strictly speaking, capable of changing the reality of things.

This notion of "founding a rhetoric," of using poetry to "change the reality of things"—how many American poets are centrally concerned with this? Recent anthologies of American poetry reflect a consignment of language to the descriptive function. Our poetry often seems domestic, reduced even to pettiness by its carefully learned specificity. Our defense, of course, is this: we are still creating a language of our own, and the essential optimism of that endeavor shines through all the hard work and inevitable confusion. While the French have had to face the erosion of a language that had seemed lapidary and eternal, we have had to face the erosion of the place itself, of America, a landscape that had seemed eternal. No more spacious skies for us, no more amber waves of grain. From the French, American poets may have learned—have indeed learned, if we think of the translators represented in this volume—a way of looking through language at the world as a collection of disparate parts. But the ultimate task of American poetry is a different one: it is to put together, from disparate parts, a language. We inhabit the blank and threatening landscape, and we speak—American poetry still seems a record of the spoken voice, not writing—in order to fill up the silent spaces we live in. The French face emptiness in the abstract; they write to fill up the blank, annihilating page.

For an American reader, the astonishing fact of these French poems is the negligible role played in them by the individual spoken voice. In this anthology we hear the spoken voice only in Prévert and Queneau (where its effect is essentially humorous), in Dadelsen, sometimes in some of the Surrealists. The poetry reading is clearly not a French habit; modern French poetry is meant to be seen, not heard. Its energy derives from the tension between the written words and the empty page. The energy of American poetry derives from the tension between the speaking voice and the empty air.

Paul Auster has done an excellent job of matching poets and translators, and has provided us with some wonderful things: Samuel Beckett's translations of

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Éluard, Nancy Cunard's Aragon, John Ashbery's Jacob, William Carlos Williams's Char. And he gives us selections from the often ignored Ségalen, Artaud and Jabès, fundamental for any long view of the French twentieth century. And in that long view, in comparison with the poets of a century, how unique and wonderful a poet is Yves Bonnefoy!

Auster disclaims any critical intent in his selection of poets, reasonably enough—the difficulties of anthologizing are well known. Still, the absence of Cocteau and Genet removes one major sensibility from this résumé of modern French poetry. And it is surprising, to an American reader, anyway, that out of the forty-nine poets represented here, only one is a woman.

The French and English texts are printed facing each other across the page. So close is English to French that almost everyone with a serious interest in literature knows some French, and this anthology, like so many others, is set up to indulge us in a game we love to play with translators—checking what we know against what they know. This is a bit like watching an international tennis match—our eyes snap back and forth from page to facing page. It is a curious kind of reading, one that vitiates the work that went into the creation of both poem and translation, and I suspect that neither poets nor translators are much in favor of it. I would like this anthology a great deal more if it had put all the translations together and followed them with the French texts. That would have given us two splendid anthologies in the space of one, and would have made the tennis game more of a physical exercise for its fanatics. Perhaps someday we will attain the linguistic confidence and self-possession of the French, who feel they ennoble an original text by translating it, and therefore generally omit it altogether. □

Matthew Arnold She's Not

DAVID SUNDELSON

LIVING BY FICTION. *By Annie Dillard. Harper & Row. 192 pp. $12.95.*

Annie Dillard has written a weak book in a noble cause. Her cause is literature and interpretation, which she defends as uniquely valuable guides to human experience and its meaning. Dillard aims at a literate but not scholarly audience—those who "read and reread the world's good books"—and *Living by Fiction* is almost entirely free of footnotes and critical jargon. Reading it demands no special expertise, and such a book could perform a real service. In a time when more and more students abandon Shakespeare for public relations, we need a strong, popular voice to tell us how culture keeps anarchy at bay, to define once more the true function of criticism. Unfortunately, Dillard is no Matthew Arnold. Although she claims that her book is "about the world," she has nothing like Arnold's familiarity with society and politics—with churches and classrooms and street meetings—or his belief that a knowledge of literature can affect what takes place in them. *Living by Fiction* says nothing at all about living, and Dillard's discussion of fiction, sensible enough at the start, descends rapidly into platitudes and vagueness.

In the first of the book's three sections, Dillard explains the techniques and ideology of what she calls "contemporary modernist fiction," or, because it expresses an underlying skepticism about knowledge, "the fiction of possibility." As she admits, much of her account is "old hat among critics," but for those baffled by writers like Borges, Nabokov and Calvino (her rather arbitrary list includes some twenty others), Dillard provides a clear and sympathetic introduction. While her broad categories are useful—her notion of "texts which stress pattern over reference," for example—superficiality is a weakness here and throughout the book. Dillard can convey the charm of particular works, Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, for instance, but she rarely devotes more than a few sentences to any one of them, and her discussion of the intellectual background of modernist fiction is far too sketchy. A long list of names and disciplines without any explanation or even the title of specific works—"Gregory Bateson in information theory, Roman Jakobson and Thomas Sebeok in semiotics, Noam Chomsky in linguistics, John Eccles and

David Sundelson teaches literature at the California Institute of Technology.

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Wilder Penfield in brain physiology"—can hardly be helpful to any reader, knowledgeable or not.

In the first section of *Living by Fiction*, this superficiality seems a small price to pay for lucid exposition and engaging style, for vivid metaphors that advance a coherent and plausible argument. Dillard writes that the flattened characters in modernist fiction are "no more lonely than chessmen," and the image reminds us of the elaborate, gamelike structures she has already discussed. In the rest of the book, however, this balance disappears: the argument gets weaker and weaker until style is all that remains. Part Two consists of barely connected musings about popular fiction, critics, publishers and prose style, and Part Three (grandly entitled "Does the World Have Meaning?") takes on metaphysics. Both are plagued by dubious generalizations, half-truths and outright contradictions.

"Formerly the novel was junk entertainment," Dillard declares, leaving us to wonder what period "formerly" refers to and whether Jane Austen and Flaubert wrote "junk entertainment." We are told on one page that "people still magically regard novelists as helpless, fascinating neurotics," but learn four pages later that "the will to believe in the fiction writer as Paul Bunyan is shockingly strong; it is emotional, like the will to believe in Bigfoot, the hairy primate who stalks the Western hills, or in the Loch Ness Monster." Here Dillard is parading her associations instead of making a point. There is a similar aimlessness in the frequent feverish bursts of rhetorical questions: "What if another novelist, say a housewife in Illinois, contrived a novel about a fictional murderer who was executed to national fanfare? What if this fabrication matched Gary Gilmore's actual life? What if it matched Mailer's text? Would the meaning be the same? Would anyone give a blessed fig?" It is hard to say whether the last question is facetious or triumphant or something else entirely, and the point of the whole passage remains obscure.

A defender might claim that images are more important for Dillard than evidence, that she sacrifices logic and coherence for greater intensity and personal flair. Perhaps, but the exchange is a poor one. In the absence of a sustained argument, the images have to do too much, and many of them are sentimental or simply ludicrous. "Each writer is . . . a lone bivouac under heaven." The art object is "like an enthusiastic and ill-trained Labrador retriever which yanks you into traffic." Dillard's tone, a peculiar mixture of whimsy and earnestness, cannot hide the sloppiness of her thinking, which is at its worst in the section on metaphysics:

> Symbol does not only refer; it acts. There is no such thing as a *mere* symbol. When you climb to the higher levels of abstraction, symbols, those enormous, translucent planets, are all there is. They are at once your only tools of knowledge and that knowledge's only object. It is no leap to say that space-time is itself a symbol. If the material world is a symbol, it is the symbol of mind, or of God. Which is more or less meaningless—as you choose. But it is not *mere*.

More or less meaningless indeed. The final chapters of *Living by Fiction* tempt one to declare that criticism should be left to the professionals, to scholars and professors. This would, of course, be a mistake. There is every reason why a thoughtful and popular writer should try to answer questions about the value and purpose of literature. But this book only shows how not to do it. □

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A Good Ol' Antique Dealer

PETER PRINCE

CADILLAC JACK. *By Larry McMurtry. Simon and Schuster. 416 pp. $15.95.*

Cadillac Jack, antique dealer by trade, is a 6-foot-5 Texan, transplanted not very happily to Washington, D.C. He is the proud possessor of a white doeskin jacket, yellow cowboy boots, a beaver Stetson with an albino-diamondback hatband, and a pearl-toned model of the car whose name he bears, complete with peach velour interior and cobra-shaped hubcaps that used to belong to Rudolph Valentino. "A comfortable vehicle," Jack allows, "in which to roam America."

It isn't entirely Larry McMurtry's fault that his new novel gives off a strong sense of *déjà vu*—there has been a surfeit of C&W/good ol' boy themes in fiction and movies lately. The smirking shade of John Travolta's urban cowboy seems to hover over most of Cadillac Jack's mild adventures, though Travolta would be far too young to play in the film version. Even Willie Nelson—and this gets closer to the area of McMurtry's culpability—would be far too young. For Cadillac Jack is carrying around in his peach velour interior a case of apathy, depression and world-weariness that would seem to need at least 150 years of bitter and dispiriting living to engender.

In his fine novels of the Southwest, McMurtry appeared to invest great stores of emotional sympathy in his characters. They were often not particularly strong or admirable people, yet the loving, intense way the author followed them and their doings rendered them touching, interesting, always alive. It's hard to see any trace of that generous intensity in *Cadillac Jack*. Once in a while the book quickens into life—usually when Jack has made a profitable or peculiar antique trade—but for the most part the writing feels flatter than the landscape around Lubbock. Regrettably, the novel is written in the first person, and thus the mournful, jaded outlook of Jack is the only vision we get. And Jack, with his small, fruitless love affairs and his long, boring hours behind the wheel of his Cadillac, is the man to squelch everything down to the level of his own deep ordinariness.

As an antidote to my feelings of depression over the book, I picked up

Peter Prince's novels are Play Things, Agents of a Foreign Power *(both Gollancz) and* The Good Father *(forthcoming from Cape). His most recent screenplay is* Oppenheimer, *shown on PBS last spring.*

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The Arms Race

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PROTEST AND SURVIVE
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introduction by Daniel Ellsberg
Debate on DISARMAMENT
THE DAY BEFORE DOOMSDAY
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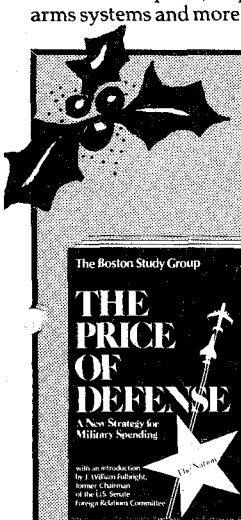

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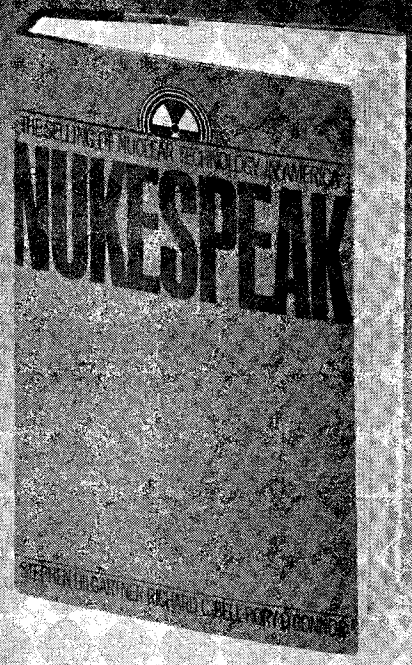

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McMurtry's earlier *Moving On* and was again quickly drawn in by the enlivening correspondences this writer can so well reveal between characters he cares about and the vast, dominant scenery in which and against which they struggle. It does seem that McMurtry's shift of focus to the Eastern megalopolis has been no more successful than has Cadillac Jack's. And, strangely, McMurtry seems to have lost in transit his generosity toward the failures and strugglers in life. Little people, it seems, are all right if they are Texas rodeo riders or gas station mechanics, but when they reveal themselves as Washington office clerks, they merit nothing but crisp disdain: "pasty-looking civil servants, wandering around like newly-risen zombies. They wore beige trench coats and cheap little woolen hats and there were dozens of them, GS-12s to however high GSs go, men so circumscribed in their styles as to seem neither dead nor alive." Sweep 'em away.

In the heart of the book there is something not uninteresting struggling to get out, some parallel between Cadillac Jack's function as a middleman between sellers and buyers of treasures which he never allows himself to possess and his similar inability to hold fast to human relationships. And McMurtry is always readable; the pages turn easily enough. Moreover, he is a canny craftsman and must have been aware of the flat tone that enfeebles this book. Unfortunately, his efforts to liven things up take the form of extended, wild fantasies about Washington high life, which, though energetic, give the impression of a society observed purely through a keyhole. Certainly it can be read by the rich and powerful with perfect equanimity. Off-target burlesques will not bother them very much. A cold, hard, unforgiving stare at their activities might have been another matter.

It is difficult for a reviewer to know quite what to do when a favorite author disappoints so keenly. Certainly there is no temptation to utter sharp, impertinent cries of "Shape up, McMurtry!" Probably the best thing is to bow the head, avert the gaze and hope for better things—perhaps a swift, safe return to Texas for this often excellent writer. It is a bold thing to try for, but it should be possible to make an effective story in which the central character is an apathetic, exhausted bore. Goncharov's *Oblomov* says it is possible. Just to write an apathetic, exhausted novel about him, however, seems an easy way out. □

Baseball, Socks, Sex and Laughs

CATHLEEN SCHINE

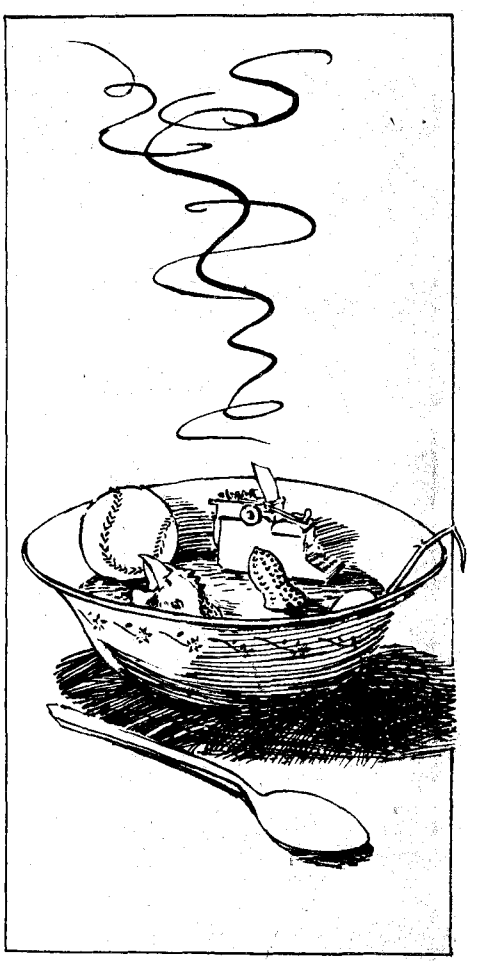
ONE FELL SOUP *or* I'M JUST A BUG ON THE WINDSHIELD OF LIFE. *By Roy Blount Jr. Atlantic-Little, Brown. 278 pp. $13.95.*

For Roy Blount Jr., the chicken is a transcendent being and cooking grease is a poetic substance. In this new collection of essays, reviews, parodies and poems, Blount turns his calm, omnivorous eye on sports, sex, food and the care of pigs. There is a Hymn to Ham and an appreciation of batting practice (the sound "is like Joan Sutherland singing in the shower"). His horse, he writes in one piece, "looked at me the other day as I was picking up a wheelbarrow full of manure and said, 'Uh . . . You realize what that *is*?'" Whether he is examining cricket cages or Jim Palmer's underpants, Blount looks at the reader and says, "Uh . . . You realize what this *is*?"

For most of us, chickens are hideous creatures. They natter and scuttle and have gnarled feet. But in a piece called "Chickens," the silly things soar, white and graceful: "The chicken is as close to man and as savory as the apple, as full of itself as the lynx or the rose. A hen's feathers feel downy but organized when you lift her up. She has a peck like a catcher's snap-throw to first. A chicken *never* makes eye contact with a person. Who is to say why it crosses the road?"

Crackers, Blount's last book, was an easygoing, disbelieving, Georgian drawl on Jimmy Carter and the good old South. *One Fell Soup*, on the other hand, is a pleasantly random gathering. Blount seems able to write about almost anything, and for almost anyone—these pieces appeared in magazines from *Eastern Airlines Pastimes* to *The New Yorker*. He has had a regular column, he tells us, "somewhere, off and on, since I was fifteen. . . . Sometimes in conversation with family and friends, or even just out in the woods nude, glowing eerily, late at night alone, I will refer to myself as 'this column.'" After so much practice, he writes with conversational ease—or seems to, anyway. Surely these pieces were written lying down, a typewriter propped comfortably on Blount's stomach?

In the introduction, Blount says that the book was almost called "*The Book of Love*. Answering the question, raised by the Monotones in 1958, 'I wonder wonder wonder . . . m'ba-doo-oo *who*, who wrote the Book of Love?'" Other disturbing questions discussed in *One Fell Soup*: "Why There Will Never Be a Great Bowling Novel," "Is the Pope Capitalized?" and which came first, the chicken or the egg ("if the egg came first, then what fertilized it? In point of fact, the egg must have come third"). Then there's "The Socks Problem": "Dust is dead socks. If it isn't dead socks, what is it? Certainly if you let the dust of two or three rooms accumulate for a while, you can shuffle your feet around the baseboards and



Cathleen Schine's first novel, Alice in Bed, *will be published by Knopf in the spring.*

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have bedroom slippers that will serve in mild climates."

There are some dead spots in *One Fell Soup*—a too-lyrical description of ballooning, a predictable jab at economics jargon—but most of the book saunters by, humming merrily. Blount investigates the homeliest phenomena with such burning thoroughness that the pieces become implicit parodies of every solemn, semischolarly academic or journalistic inquiry.

In the best section of the book, "Love and Other Indelicacies," Blount takes on the naughty and the sensuous by being a little naughty and sensuous himself. In "So This Is Male Sexuality," he recoils from Shere Hite's approach to writing about sex: "I like to read about food, but I don't want to read a lot of 'I like to chew a bite of peas three or four times and then just let it rest on the very back part of my tongue where it arches up a little and . . .'" There is a learned and gentle essay on testicles, "The Family Jewels," which considers these curious objects in their various historical and cultural contexts. Roy Cohn is invoked. So is Mother Teresa. "Incidentally," Blount notes, "*orchid* is Greek for 'testicle,' which may account for the pride with which girls used to wear them on prom dresses."

Blount's reports from the odd corners of human existence are more than funny—they are illuminating. One really *understands* testicles after reading "The Family Jewels," and one is grateful. But one is also grateful for the jokes. Blount parodies sex studies in "The Orgasm: A Reappraisal" ("The orgasm is not really ideal for everyone"). He parodies gossip columns in "Whose Who" and advice columns in "Wired Into Now" ("Q. If I knew famous people, would they like me?"). He jabs at journalistic forms and "topics" with the enthusiasm of a child poking a rotten tree trunk with a stick, then sits, grinning, watching all the funny little facts crawl out. One can say of many humorists, "Nothing is sacred to him." For Roy Blount, nothing is mundane. □

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R	■	S	■	N	■	C	■	S	■	E	■	V	■	U
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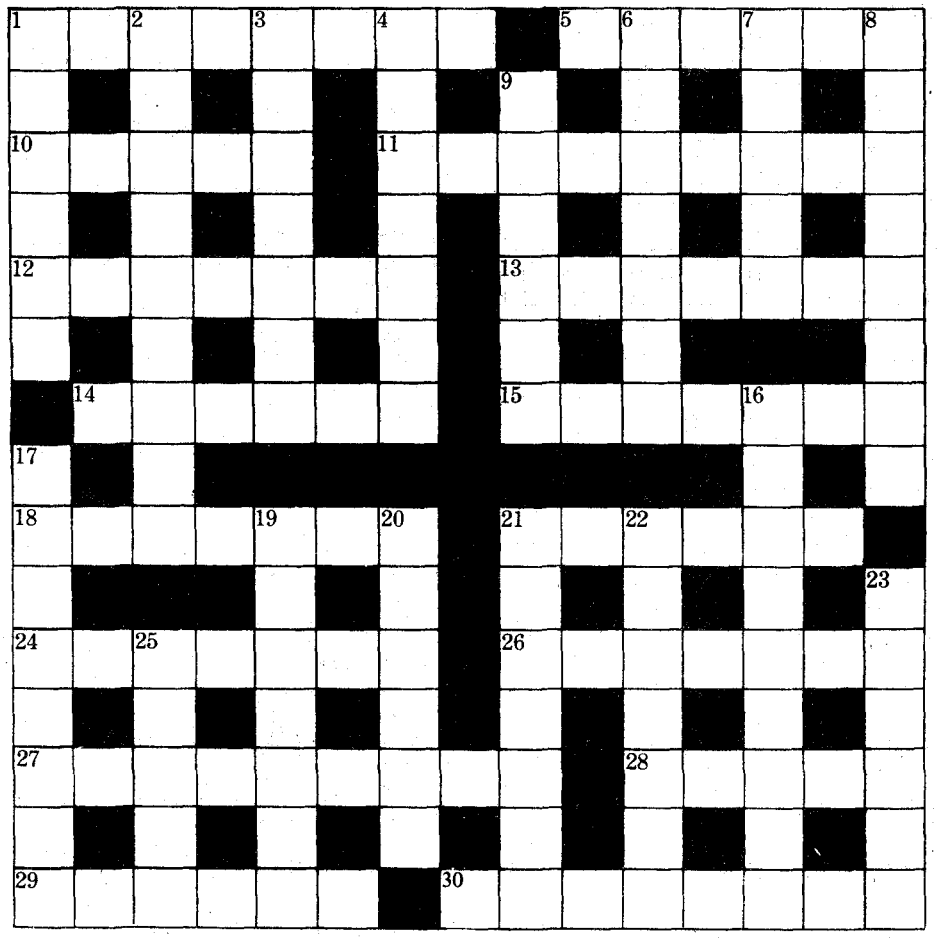
Crossword Puzzle No. 1938

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 and 5 Marked by sunrise and sunset, time after time. (3,2,3,3,3)
10 Engages in modern dancing and reels, perhaps. (5)
11 Car with the carpet attached—self-driven, no doubt. (9)
12 A little place to sleep on the lake—at least set for it. (7)
13 A procession? Get back in the middle! (7)
14 Some letters contain what the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table might have appreciated. (6)
15 A small amount of conscientious reluctance. (7)
18 Look for gold, and suffer pain with a certain sense of style. (7)
21 Sounds like one with a hack in the chest. (6)
24 See 26
26, 7 down, 28 and 24 According to the story, did the residence of the leading man prove tumble-down? (3,4,2,3,5,2,5)
27 If one does with the receiver, it might be considered a completion. (9)
28 See 26
29 Sort of silent service joined if one does? (6)
30 Certainly not casual dress. (8)

DOWN

1 and 17 Alternating, when it comes to current? (Black to white, for example.) (6,8)
2 Many chest contents should be for sailors, obviously. (9)
3 Found right in a bad tonsil, but much closer to the front. (7)
4 The ones closest are found in the home, as some say. (7)
6 Was one originally responsible for the mail? (7)
7 See 26 across
8 Offered to take care of wild deer? (8)
9 Pierces with little pieces of wood. (6)
16 Somewhat less wild upbringings in unsullied environment, but not yet ready. (9)
17 See 1 down
19 He is placed in the middle of things, and 9, possibly. (7)
20 Deserved to get one of those things Antony wanted, coming to a bad end. (6)
21 A stone possibly seen at night on the road. (7)
22 When the flower gets suddenly big? (7)
23 A man who acts as his own lawyer is said to have a fool for one. (6)
25 Up to then, a world body got lit up, naturally! (5)

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